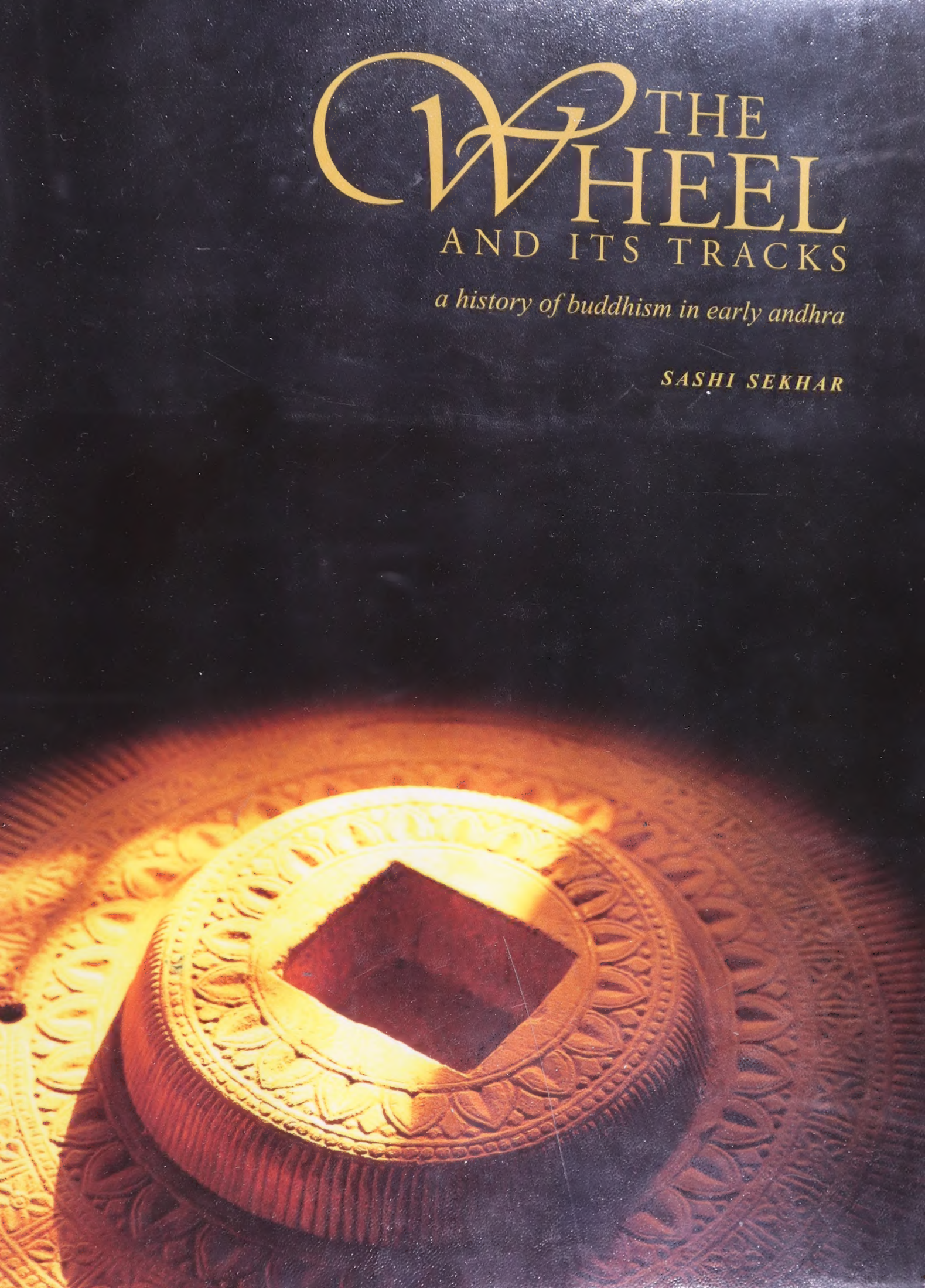
# THE WHEEL AND ITS TRACKS

*a history of buddhism in early andhra*

SASHI SEKHAR



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# THE WHEEL AND ITS TRACKS

*a history of buddhism in early andhra*


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2006

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*carving emptiness* 250

*truth seems nearer when one stands on the shoulders of gaints*

**our humble work is dedicated to the efforts of**

robert sewell  jas burgess  alexander rea

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romila thapar  v v krishna sastry  p v parabrahma sastry

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k satchidananda murthy staff and students at

mahayana buddhist research centre nagarjuna university

n s ramachandra murthy  e sivanagi reddy  b subrahmanyam  lars fogelin

.... and all those innumerable scholars

researching the buddhist past of andhra pradesh

# *prologue*

Buddhism in its institutional form followed a pattern of integration, organisation and influence in concurrence to the early history of societies across the sub-continent. The entire process can be unified into the metaphor of the wheel of Dharma that the Buddha had turned during his first sermon in the Deer Park at Sarnath. The integration of various cultures can be seen as spokes of the wheel held by the organisation of early Sangha, the swivel. The growth of trade and polity that increased patronage could be seen as the motion of the wheel, which slowed down by the growth of local cults, when Buddhism slowly dissipated to isolation and eventual abandonment.

*an elephant stump; dhanyakataka. period three. lower krishna valley*

When he died in an orchard outside Kusinara, perhaps in the summer of the year 486 BCE, Gautama the ascetic was probably 80.He had preached the Dharma for 45 long years to royalty, merchants, farmers, mendicants and just about anybody who had a question. Travelling through dusty villages and towns of the Gangetic Plain and often with an aching back, his simple yet profound wisdom was canonised the very year he died, during the rains when monks retreated to their caverns for four months till the onset of winter.

Nothing is certain of what the monks had actually retrieved and versified from their collective memory during the First Buddhist Council. There were to be three more such councils in ancient India making the Master's original word opaque. The earliest version of the Buddha's word in the form that is available today was compiled in Sri Lanka 500 years after his death. The Buddha was by then deified, redefined and customised in accordance to contexts literally and otherwise far away from the Gangetic plains of his day. The motley crowd of monks who accompanied the Teacher grew into a vast order spread across the Indian sub-continent. Rules of the order were often the point of schisms and the new faction of the original Order framed fresh rules tailored to fit their distant terrain.

An imperial class, not known to Buddha, soon emerged to recognise the integrating nature of the Buddhism in empires with divergent cultures at various stages of historical evolution. Royal patronage was unanimous through the ancient period. Strengthened by emerging trade routes benevolent merchant classes among other elite sponsored the monks. Buddhist establishments thrived. Cave monasteries were chiselled out of mountains and stacked with rice from fields freshly cleared of forests.

The ashes and bones of the great Master distributed originally among eight Republican clans in northern India were unearthed and redistributed in minute proportions throughout the sub-continent during Asoka's reign. These relics enclosed in exquisite caskets were to be the basis of an entirely new cult within the early monastic phase. The Buddha was being seen as the final incarnation in the successions of thousands of former lives. Each of these lives was in turn loosely based on the historical Sakyamuni. Sometime during the 1st century BCE beautiful icons of the Buddha were carved. The monastery had all these and ever-increasing laity. It was the finest hour of art, philosophy and literature but not exactly what the Buddha had intended.

The Master spoke of suffering and deliverance. He never claimed to be divine. Impermanence as against its realisation was to be through a conscious life. Mass liberation and its cultural form were precisely what the Buddha disapproved. The ageless idea of an individual seen as a representative preceptor of the ultimate reality over took the possibility to scheme one's own liberation that was at the heart of the Master's teachings. It was replaced by what is seen today as one of the "largest personality cult ever in human history", rivalled only by that of Jesus Christ.

The reasons are colourfully many. The Buddha's compassion to share his realisation was probably was overtaken by the need to redefine the specific cultural objectives during that fluid epoch. What were these objectives? What influenced them? The preceptor and his ideals assumed a cultural role skipping the original orbit. Purpose was constantly defined by situational gravity. In spite of these numerous transmutations, Buddhism to all intents and purposes retained its core teachings that remain transparent to this day. But it is the search for the complex web of cultural reality on a historical scale and in the specific context of ancient Andhra that fuelled the need for this book.

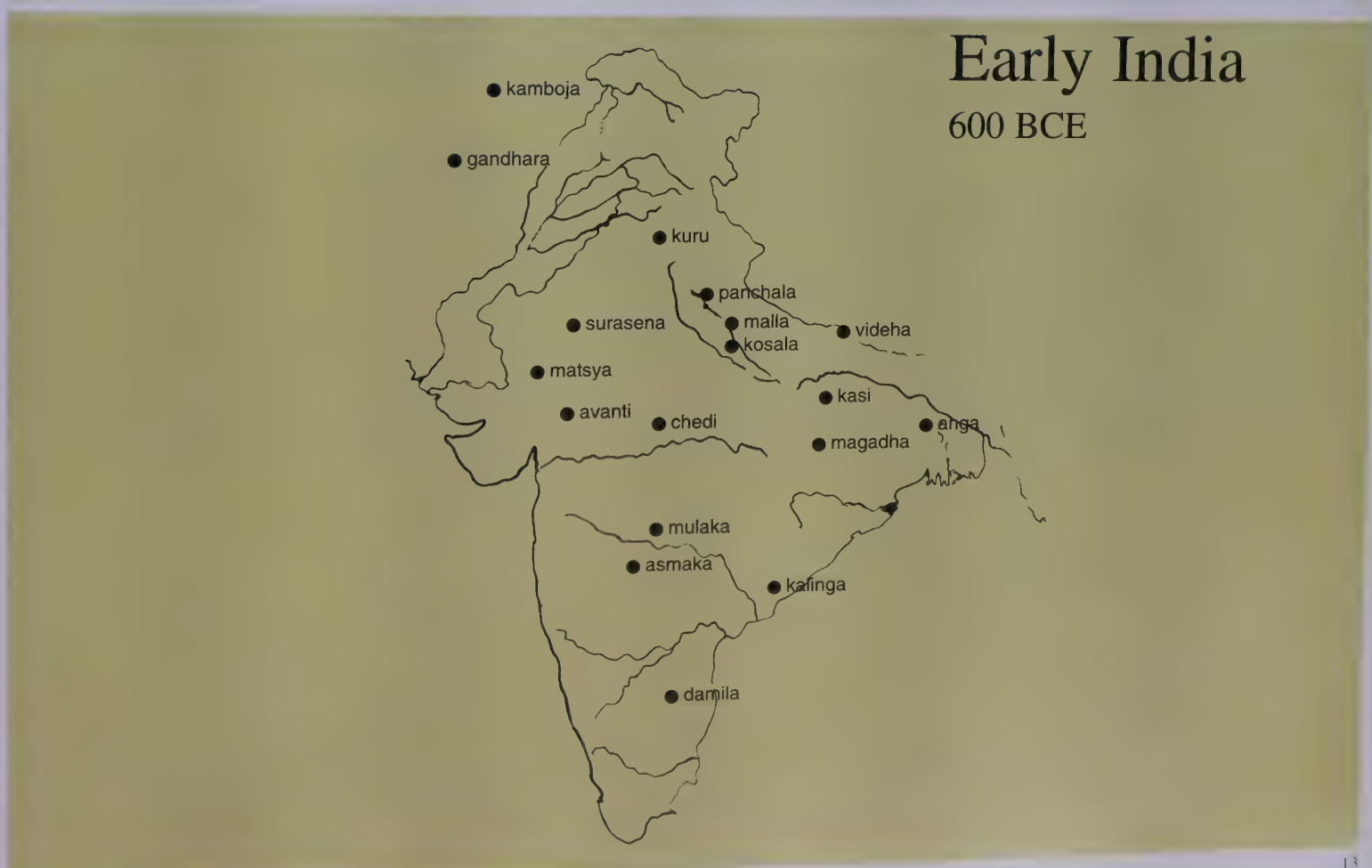
The Vedic tradition was for long seen as the fountainhead of anything religious in the sub-continent. Its historical date and origin intrigued the colonial historian to assume that the Vedas and their milieu were the nucleus of all intellectual legacies in the sub-continent. Such an assumption and misreading were countered suddenly by the discovery of the Indus Valley sites in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The focus immediately was to mark contradictions between the Indus ruins, which had no literary reference of their own, indecipherable seals notwithstanding. The historic reading of Vedic literature was by then a scholarly mess.

The entire history of the sub-continent during the early post-colonial period was seen to be some sort of an ancient contest between a vast civilisation of supposedly "native" origin, which had apart from its material prosperity a philosophic tradition. This culture was pitted against nomadic, "conservative", Caucasian invaders with a tradition of hymn singing. Cultures across the sub-continent are even today viewed in terms of the triumph or tribulation of either of these perceived contestants.

Fresh archaeological evidence and a better reading of the earliest parts of the Rig-Veda have conclusively drawn the Aryan invasion theory as wrong. Rajesh Kocchar in his path-breaking book (The Vedic People: Their History and Geography 2000) suggests that the word Sindhu was the generic name used by Indo-Aryans for any river. Sapta Sindhu referred to in the Rig-Veda was in fact the river systems in southern Afghanistan and eastern Iran and not in the Punjab region. In fact the early Vedic Aryans did not know the Indus. The later Aryans who made India their home had reused some of these names and hence the confusion.

On the other hand the Indus people do not seem to be as "native" as we would want them to have been. To consider the Indus cultures, as a racial unit is a factual error to begin with. People of different racial affinities merged to a civilisation over several millennia. The earliest settlements dated around 7000 BCE were in the Sindh province of present day Pakistan. Eventually these settlements grew to become large townships towards the east into the plains of the Indus valley. Archaeologists have proved that around 2000BCE a section of Indo-Aryans, unrelated to the Rig-Vedic Aryans, along with their fire rituals had integrated into the social fabric of the Indus people during the final phase before the towns were gradually abandoned.

The Vedas initially were sacrificial hymns sung at rituals invoking the various forces of nature. These texts were part of an open tradition composed between 1700BCE to



*panel with scene from vessentara jataka; dhanyakataka.period three. lower krishna valley*

1000BCE.The form and thematic variations, authorship and the flow of narrative points to a shared experience of merging cultures. Compilations of these hymns were done after a major portion of individual hymns composed within a specific environment was complete before the nomadic herdsmen moved to their next destination. Each of these compilations was subject to re-sequencing over a period of time.

The Vedas are not generically unique. These hymns have cultural counterparts in early Avestan texts from Iran, which provide base for the Zoroastrian religion. The tradition of hymn singing itself can still be found in several modern nomadic communities across central Asia. For instance the Manas, an epic tradition, orally transmitted from one generation to the next is found among Tartar herdsmen. It has affinities both in form and content to Rig-Vedic hymns.

Careful study of the early parts of the Rig Veda and the Avestan texts reveal information which match locations like rivers, hills, valleys in parts of Iran and southern Afghanistan. Archaeological records from extensive excavations in these areas and further west have divulged enough evidence to support the argument that there was once a common Indo-Iranian habitat from where several groups branched out primarily into southern Afghanistan where the early parts of the Rig-Veda were composed.

The Vedic people were agro-pastoral nomads who had rituals based on a world-view idealised by a certain balance in Nature. The hymns in an archaic language (close to Sanskrit) speak of hardships pastoral nomads usually face. The earliest parts of the Rig-Veda have in them a rustic nature, even by the folk standards of the Vedic hymns in general. This must have been in tune with the hard-times and terrain where they were composed. The inhospitable land, search for grasslands, wars and epidemics are some oft-repeated themes. Deliverance is sought by invoking the Elements, each having anthropomorphic qualities.

The Vedic Aryans migrated into the northwestern portions of the sub-continent after 1800BCE and intermingled with splinter cultures that moved away from the Indus towns. The character of the hymns composed during this period is markedly different from the earlier phase. The original Rig Vedic families seem to have merged with the priestly classes of Post-Harappans to create new families of priests and bards who contributed to the hymn tradition. Some earlier rituals were being abandoned along with their related hymns. New family names, personal names, places, implements and deities make their first appearances. The language itself was giving way to fresh words widening the vocabulary deduced from spoken languages of the host cultures paving way for Sanskrit. These new strains first appear in the later part of the Rig-Veda and continue with a cumulative effect into the other three Vedas.

Despite of such exchanges the Vedic theme remains essentially pastoral. An alluring sense of the collective prevails. Individual quest for truth does not enter the repertoire even towards the end of the open tradition around 1000BCE. Neither the Vedic hymns nor the oral traditions akin to the Vedas have anything that can even remotely be called epistemology, unless one purposefully over-reads to ascribe such motives to them. Vedas being the oldest surviving religious records in human history are usually seen as containing the germ of Indian Philosophy.

One need not be surprised if the Vedic texts themselves provide reason for misinterpretation. The desuetude of a large portion of early Vedic vocabulary had made the reading of the Vedas and especially its earlier parts difficult to an impossible degree. Scholars had to salvage meaning by getting into root-words and if necessary through linguistic comparison. Despite meticulous lexicons specially made for reading and translating the Vedas differing opinions do exist. It is only since the 1970's that archaeological proof is also being pieced together to solve the complex Aryan jigsaws puzzle eluding scholars for centuries.

Epistemology, in this context, can at best be described as a free inquiry and speculation about the origin, nature and perpetuation of realities affirmed or contested by practice. Over ages such philosophical legacies get refined through reinterpretation dictated by any number of things from migrant influences to expansion of cultural strata and its mutations. An element of ritual could entail a certain epistemological tradition (Buddhism is a live example) as part of its intellectual inquest but never at the expense of its essence. Further, epistemology or philosophy takes shape necessarily at an evolved stage charged and defined by affluence, urbanity and exchange among other pointers. In modern times the folk-song nature of Vedic texts has been blown-out of proportion to accommodate everything under the sun from philosophical speculation to aeronautical engineering.

Free inquiry was not part of the Vedic legacy when the hymns were being composed. An ascetic tradition parallel to the Vedic realm would have definitely existed. The earliest evidence comes from a hymn in the Sama Veda where an ascetic is mocked as a cow that leaves the herd to find its own pastures. Among the cultural contents that the Indus inhabitants probably carried along to their new abode was an intellectual legacy from their long abandoned towns. Scholars see a seal depicting a male sitting in a cross-legged meditative posture found at Mohenjadaro as representing a tradition of asceticism. The ancient Vedic religion did not endorse asceticism as part of its social vision until much later in history.

The ascetic tradition, also called the Sramanic tradition seems to have continued through the times along with the use of iron and Vedic rituals right into the Gangetic plains. The Buddha was a Sramana. The inhabitants of the abandoned Indus towns moved to small clusters in the Punjab region along with the Rig Vedic Aryans. Exchange between the Rig-Vedic Aryans and the Post-Harappans is manifested in form of pottery, which archaeologists refer to as the Painted Grey Ware (PGW) culture. The gradual movement of the Painted Grey Ware cultures into the Gangetic plain saw them encounter and integrate with several other cultures during the Iron Age roughly after 1000 BCE. This integration is manifested in a fine variety of pottery called the Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) and a culture referred to by that name. Gautama, the scion of the Sakya clan belonged to that era.

The long journey from the banks of the Helmand to the plains and valleys of the Ganga and Yamuna was coming to an end. So were the hymns. As stated earlier the compilations of Vedic hymns were complete after 1000 BCE. The Buddha had certainly drawn from an ancient tradition that is patently confused with the Upanishads. Antedating Upanishads to the Buddha usually does this. Careful examination of dates would prove otherwise.

The hymn compilations were followed by prose reconstruction for each Veda called the Brahmanas succeeded by the Aranyakas that could be seen as the starting point of the Vedic transition into philosophic speculation. The earliest Upanishad text Chandogya is either included in or appended to the last of the Aranyaka sequence. If all the above mentioned literary activity can be given a time bracket of at least 300 years it leaves us with the date of 600 BCE for the compilation of the Chandogya Upanishad. Since 556 BCE is traditionally regarded as the year of the Buddha's birth, Chandogya should have been a contemporary text. Vedic or Upanishadic influences on the Buddha are therefore ruled out. In fact the Aranyakas and the Upanishads need to be seen as texts influenced by the Sramanic tradition.

With the introduction of iron after 1000BCE, expansion towards the eastern end of the Ganga was possible by clearing forests. Large-scale agriculture and its surplus induced trade. The northwestern portion of the sub-continent and the Gangetic plain were connected by a good number of trade routes. Central and western India and gradually the south joined the early matrix of trade. Prosperity ushered the growth of cities that in turn gave rise to a republican polity. Although large populaces still survived on land and its yield the sustenance economy was apportioned so as to eliminate stress on the land and the cultivator.

Literary texts of the early historic period of the Gangetic plains provide us an understanding of the economy separated between the hunting-gathering communities. nomadic agro-pastoralists, the small-farmers, land-owners who were also active traders and the urban traders themselves. This vicissitude was not by design. It prompted a cultural fluidity typical of an emerging society. The ancient Sramanic tradition seems to have found instant articulation in this ambience. The Sramana became an

*votive stupa; bojjanakonda. 3rd century CE. north coastal andhra*

emblem to the degree of cultural attainment in the changed atmosphere of the Gangetic plains. The Sramanas were patronised by the trade guilds and ruling elite not just as a way of legitimising their identity but also as part of perpetuating an ancient tradition, which probably was very much part of the contemporary collective memory.

Within the Vedic realm the Brahmanas were being composed. These texts have a definitive tone that marks an end to the open tradition of the hymns implying a shift towards conservatism. The conservatism in the Brahmanas manifests a reaction against the social transition from agro-pastoralism to the expansion of agrarian economy and trade in the backdrop of the early habitation phase in the Gangetic plains, around 900 BCE. Interestingly this was also the time the earliest in the Aranyaka series were composed influenced by the Sramanic tradition.

The stress of adapting to a changed milieu is quite palpable in this division. The divergence of theme and purpose brought in further divisions owing to family allegiances to a part or several parts of the Vedic hymns. The growth and the extension of Vedic culture towards peninsular India impelled much of this. Subsistence patterns in new terrain and local interactions made way to Sutra literature starting around the 4th Century BCE. The Vedic realm was not the monolith it was made out to be in the medieval period. It was definitely not an influence on the converging multitudes that made up societies in the vast Gangetic plain of the early historic period.

By the 6th century BCE the Gangetic plain was extending with its towns. Local cultures within its sway that in turn contributed wealth through trade and agriculture must have sought the Sramanic tradition as a legitimate way to integrate into the new context. The Sramanas were all over the place and wielded huge influence.

The Buddha's life comes to us through a series of myths associated with his birth, early life, renunciation, wanderings, self-realisation, preaching and his death. These myths have to be carefully sifted through to separate fact from myth. Material and literary sources contemporaneous to the Buddha have to be meticulously examined to reach any logical conclusion. Interestingly the myths themselves were never stagnant. Each new epoch within Buddhism drew a fresh reassembling of myths about the great Teacher's life, where the oldest myths are not necessarily the most authentic. It is not the objective of this book to draw any historical conclusion about the Buddha's life. However some aspects regarding the background of those times seem pertinent.

Apart from the Jainas and the Buddhists we know of eighty other Sramanic sects of the Buddha's day. None of them survived. We know of their existence primarily through Jaina and Buddhist texts where their preceptors and their ideas are stated in brief and not always in an objective light. Most of these sects must have had legacies stretching back to the days of the Indus towns, while some were radical creeds with local patronage.

The Buddha's influence undoubtedly came from the Sramanic traditions. Scholars like Dharmanand Kosambi suggest clues in early Buddhist monastic texts that point to the influence of certain Jaina traditions amongst the Sakyas. Myths notwithstanding, this could be true adhering to the fact that the Jainas count 23 preceptors before Mahavira suggesting a very ancient lineage. Apart from these, there are myths of Gautama very early in life inclining to the practice of meditation. This interest seems to have prompted him along with the other legendary causes to seek tutelage with the well-known teachers of the Gangetic plains of his day.

We know the names of two such teachers, Aalara Kalama and Uddhaka Ramaputta. Both of them were of Kshtriya origin, of the Kalama and Koliya clans respectively who probably had the same teacher. They had taught Gautama meditative techniques. Dissatisfied with what he had learnt Gautama moved on to rigorous ascetic practices for seven long years and found all of them to be equally useless until he finally attained wisdom under the Bo Tree.

The Buddha's mission is usually equated to a rebellion against caste discrimination. There are several references in early monastic literature quoted to strengthen this argument. The best reference comes through in the Ambhatta Sutta of the Digha Nikya where there is a discourse about the superiority of the Kshtriyas in relation to the Brahmins. As stated earlier, there is no way to point exactly what the Buddha spoke since much of these references come from early monastic texts which were constantly rewritten until a late period in history when they were finally canonised.

The Ambhatta Sutta proves the Kshtriyas to be superior by inverting the theory based on the purity of birth. The Master does this by quoting the legend of Ikshvaku, who banishes the children of his wife, the queen to let the children of his concubine inherit the throne. The vanquished retreat to the hills where they form the Sakya clan. The Brahmins are said to be descendants of the Ikshvaku's concubine. The theme of caste recurs through the Digha Nikya in the Thevichha Sutta, Kutadanta Sutta and the Agganya Sutta.

## t i m e l i n e

| | |
|---|---|
| 2000 BCE | merger of an aryan element into indus culture |
| 1800 BCE | final abandonment of indus towns |
| 1700 BCE | early hymns of rigveda composed in south afghanistan |
| 1400 BCE | arrival of vedic aryans into punjab<br>new language elements in rigveda |
| 1200 BCE | later vedic hymns composed<br>first notices of sramanic culture |
| 1000 BCE | vedic hymns closed. exception of atharva veda<br>beginning of vedic compilations and recensions |
| 900 BCE | brahmana texts open |
| 800 BCE | early towns in gangetic plains |
| 700 BCE | aranyaka texts open<br>early strains of sankya, nyaya and vaisesika |
| 600 BCE | chandogya upanishad composed |
| 556 BCE | birth of the buddha |
| 300 BCE | earliest of law books compiled |
| 269-34 BCE | piyadassi asoka's reign |

The Buddha constantly dismisses the argument of birth and its purity as any indication of superiority.

The proof of Kshtriya superiority actually does not need the aid of these texts. The Republican polity of Buddha's age would be a far more authentic proof. The Republican states had a democratic system where the King was in most cases elected to the throne. Through literary references gleaned from both Buddhist and Jaina sources the Republican administration was decentralised, trade guilds, big and small were autonomous with strong local traditions. Such indicators can only belong to a transitory age where caste could be identified simply by work, habitation and wealth or a combination of all the three.

Caste, in the form that we now know, is a hegemonic institution. Its core is a hierarchical social structure where integration in all its forms is closed. The components of hierarchy based on caste change but at a defined pace. Work, habitation and most importantly wealth are centralised. New cultures coming in the way of an expanding caste society are necessarily viewed as outcastes. The society of Buddha's day was definitely not typified by such hegemony. Sadly, much of our perception of caste as a socio-historic institution is contemporary and hopelessly tempro-centric. The system of caste with its hegemonic structure was a very late feature in the culture evolution of these societies in India coinciding roughly with the period of Buddhism's decline.

While remaining in tune with the Sramanic tradition, the Buddha seems to have radically altered it by introducing simple practice verifiable with a system of ethics. In other words he seems to have rationalised core Sramanic traditions. The overall simplicity of the Buddha's argument and its effective communication would have brought in huge laity. The social integration of peripheral communities meant that society would also take in influences from those communities. These interactions altered the Buddha's teaching into a mass religion.

The State and its republican character were subdued with the growth of monarchy based on lineage, which was fast gaining ground. Legitimacy was now being sought in the mythical past. The mass appeal of the Buddhists was actively being sought. Asoka succeeded in institutionalising Buddhism to his own advantage while striving to maintain the integrity of his massive empire. These momentous changes within the Gangetic plain during and after the reign of Asoka were transferred to other places where the influence of Buddhism was beginning to show. By the beginning of the 2nd century BCE ancient Andhra that was spread over Telengana, Vidarbha, north Karnataka, south Madhya Pradesh and southern Orissa became the hub of Buddhism.

# identity of a multitude

18

an embellished rice-threshing stool made from d

The word 'Andhra' is a grinning enigma. Scholars delve deep into ancient texts to listen to resonances of peoples banished for sacrilege. Books on Andhra history invariably start with the legend of an unspecified profanation before passing through vague comments earned over several centuries. The multiple identities of the Andhras make reconstructing its history an athletic task. Sporadic literary references require constant re-sequencing with good help from field archaeology along an abounding speculation to assure, if nothing else, safe landing on the earliest known reality.

20 View from the summit of the hill agwah kw

The Andhra that we now know is contained within the boundaries of the modern state of Andhra Pradesh, which was formed on the 1st of November 1956. The landmass is the eastward tilt of the Deccan plateau drained by the rivers Godavari, Krishna and Penna that flow into the Bay of Bengal. The whole area is roughly divided into Telengana, Rayalaseema and the Coastal districts. Telengana is a continuation of a portion of the Karnataka plateau with rounded hills and broad open valleys. Geological faulting has helped it retain a belt of Gondwanaland in the northern portions where the river Godavari enters Andhra Pradesh.

The south of the river Krishna and in continuation of the Telengana plateau is Rayalaseema. The heart of Rayalaseema is the Nandyala valley drained by the river Kunderu. To its west are irregular ranges of hills and towards the east are the dense Nallamalla and Veligonda forests running parallel, which are essentially part of the Eastern Ghats. The Eastern Ghats are a discontinuous chain of hills running east-north-east from the Nilagiri hills in Tamilnadu to the Khondmal hills in Orissa having no structural or topographical continuity. In a rough sense they divide Telengana and Rayalaseema from the thin strip of coastal districts.

The discontinuity in the Eastern Ghats created passes and valleys through which people from the earliest times came to habituate the land called the Coastal districts. This geographic distinction has come to create a cultural divide between the regions of Andhra Pradesh blurring historical view, which needs to look beyond the divisions of present language, region and, most importantly, the perception of the past.

The existence of "grand civilisations" on the banks of the Indus in the north-west of India and on the Ganga in the north cannot be the only scales to gauge the importance of contemporary cultures outside that domain. Long decades of painstaking fieldwork by archaeologists allow us to figure the pre and proto-historic profiles of peninsular India. Beginning Andhra history with a reference in a post-Vedic text would mean to subtract a background of nearly 1500 years or more. It could also subordinate a millennium and a half of culture to a remark in a literary text while retaining its immense historical ambiguity. It would be appropriate to begin with the early Neolithic phase in south-central India.

Like elsewhere the Neolithic is typified by the domestication of animals and plants, use of polished stone axes and blades, settled life, production of pottery, which initially was hand-made along with the use of cooper and bronze tools. The entire period could be divided roughly into three phases between 2500 BCE to 1000 BCE. The origin of the Neolithic people is not yet known. They probably were migrants who might have spoken early forms of Dravidian languages. They seem to have moved from west Asia into the Deccan region through Gujarat and co-existed with the previous Mesolithic cultures and in most cases lived in the same habitat.

By the end of the initial phase Neolithic culture spread from Maharashtra towards northern Karnataka, the entire Telengana region and the upper reaches of Rayalaseema. Stone tools that were more refined then the preceding Mesolithic were made from locally available rock such as dolerite and basalt. Habitations were found around hills or rock formations with the common tool types being triangular axes, adzes, picks, rubbing stones, ring stones, querns and several varieties of blades. Pottery is usually hand-made grey and buff ware, which sometimes has a black or red burnished slip, decorated in purple with motifs. But the most significant finds of this phase are ash-mounds created by the ritual burning of dung and dried wood. It points to an economy centred on cattle. Terracotta figurines of humped cattle along with cave paintings of grazing animals and carbonised millet grain in burial sites along with rock painting and bruising all over the Deccan suggest an agro-pastoral stage.

The second phase in the Neolithic age begins around 1800 BCE. Although settlements around hills continue, circular huts made by wattle and daub with floors plastered with mud are discernible. Stone tools get refined while blades show standardisation. Pottery has newer elements with perforated and spouted vessels and pots having affinities with those found in Baluchistan in the early phases of Indus civilisation and in West Asia. The most important aspect of this phase is the increasing interaction of cultures prompted by the flow of goods between southern Maharashtra, northern Karnataka, Rayalaseema and Telengana.

The final Neolithic phase is called the Chalcolithic. It is typified by the use of copper and bronze implements. Through comparison with material cultures found elsewhere one can safely assume that the Chalcolthic people moved in from regions around Iran and in some ways related to the Neolithic migrants of the first phase. Swords and dirks of copper or bronze with midribs and antennae hilts were found in large numbers in southern Maharashtra, northern Karnataka, Rayalaseema and Telengana. Gradually these implements also made way into the lower-Krishna valley and several other parts of the coastal strip. Pottery of a highly refined variety, copper and bronze smelting sites, burial and habitation sites in the final phase dot the entire area that is now Andhra Pradesh.

Agro-pastoral economy does not see any radical shift from the first phase except for the domestication of newer species of millet and an early strain of rice. Burial furniture and material finds in habitation areas signify a strong sense of religion. Although habitation continuity is noticed between the first and final phase of the Neolithic in several areas, isolated habitations of the first and second phase continue with the same material culture or by adapting slight variations.

Going by the archaeological record the Chalcolithic people of probable Mediterranean origin might have migrated in several phases each again having within them primary, transitory and concluding phases of settlement. Each new interaction with the migrants brought in refined technology prompting a greater degree of culture. We have reasons to be sure that by 1000 BCE languages that are classified as Middle-Dravidian like Gond, Kuvi, Khond, Savara and others must have reached a relatively mature stage. These languages in later times gave rise to Telugu. By the beginning of the last millennium before the Christian era a highly evolved culture emerged in the Deccan.

These cultural aspects give a distinct demographic setting spread over parts of eastern and southern Maharashtra, northern Karnataka, Rayalaseema, Telengana and southern Chhattisgarh adjoining southeastern Orissa. This area from hereon would be referred as the Core Area. The Core Area must have had significant exchange and imbibed primary cultural similarities going by the archaeological record of the second stage of the final phase in the Neolithic. There is a spread-effect during the secondary Neolithic phase overlapping with the Chalcolithic towards the Coastal plains in the southeast of Andhra Pradesh and the North. Agro-pastoral cultures with belief-systems use of copper and bronze and ripening languages are strong indicators of civilisation.

A sudden change occurs in the time after 1200 BCE in the Deccan. Burial sites with huge memorial stones appear with large tombs and elaborate grave goods, which include iron objects and a black and red wheel-turned pottery. The culture around such burial sites were given the name 'Megalithic' in tune with similar sites found in places as far as Baluchistan, Northern Iran, Spain and Wales in England. Within the sub-continent Megalithic sites are observed sparsely between Punjab in the west along with areas in south Kashmir to Assam in the East. Their abundance is however towards central and south central India and as far as the southern districts of Tamilnadu and Kerala.

The Megalithic culture is typified by the sophisticated employment of Iron, intermingling with the previous Chalcolithic people, the development of irrigation on a large scale and eventually the growth in the volume of exchange

*megalithic dolmen: thoggarai & Ot*

## megaliths

**Rock-cut caves.** Underground carvings in lateritic sub-soil.

Hood-stones consisting of large dressed hemispherical slabs.

**Dolmenoid cists** Burial chambers of stone.

Circumscribed by single or double stone circles.

**Cromlechs Kistavaens** large free standing stones.

Set in rows or alignment.

**Cairn circles**

Resembling the letter 'C'.

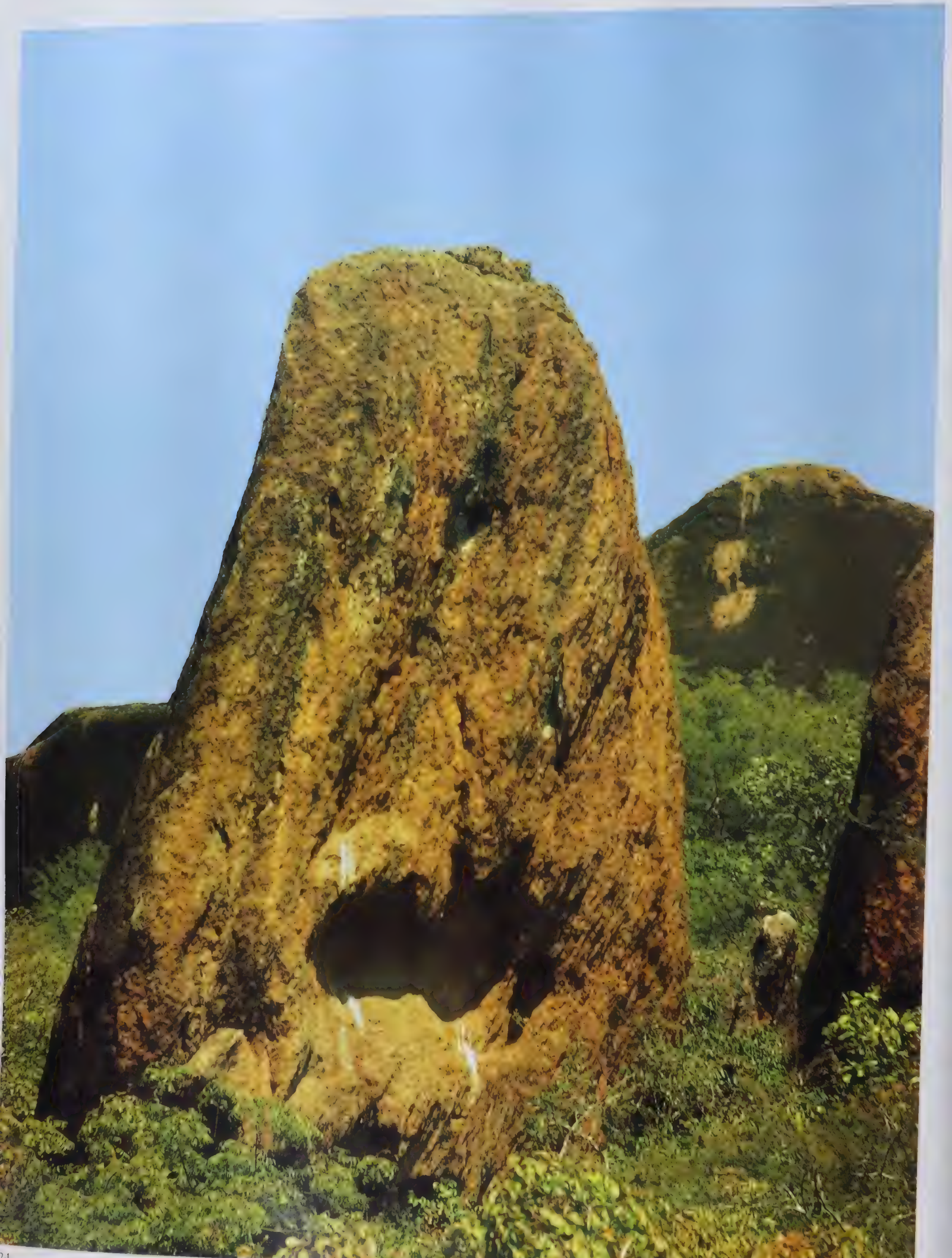
Single or multiple urns.

and trade coinciding with the development of urban centres especially in the central Deccan. Like any other historical phase the megalithic has it own phases of development. Going by the archaeological record the earliest stage is between 1200 BCE to 800 BCE, which overlaps with the Chalcolithic. The Secondary stage is between 800 BCE and 500 BCE. The third phase is between 500 BCE to 3rd Century of the Christian era. Protrusion of the Megalithic with the early historic phase is quite perceptible.

The origins of the Megalithic are like the Neolithic cultures quite obscure. Among the contesting opinions two are quite piquant. Some scholars discern resemblance between the cultures of the Indus towns and the Megalithic, which they further observe are of Dravidian origin, while others claim the Megalithic to be an Indo-Aryan sub-culture which parted ways with its fraternity owing to differences in the way the dead are disposed. The Aryans cremated their dead. They further prove the difference by examples of hymns, which contain malice towards those who bury their dead. As pointed earlier the tendency to reduce any historical theme to the supposed contrariety of the Indus civilisation and the Indo-Aryans is no longer valid. This approach of fusing varied cultures in proto-historical India to the Indus towns is as much a delusion as the tendency to find Vedic parallels to death rituals. In fact reducing a whole culture to the way the dead were disposed is itself unfair.

The archaeological record of a culture is to be examined in the light of preceding or succeeding cultures and in a local context. Its variants could obviously be gleaned outside the cultural boundaries but not without understanding transitions. Mutually exclusive cultural histories don't exist in the sub-continent. Distinct features of any culture cannot be compromised at the behest of fusion. The transfusion of culture itself cannot be uni-linear. Several local traditions could have contributed their might to a new tradition trying to find a foothold through a historical exchange and in turn the local traditions, when perceived in a sub-regional context, could have altered themselves while integrating into a larger tradition. Reasons other then those that can be readily reckoned would have influenced the range, frequency and succession of cultural transactions. Adaptability to the natural environment, patterns of socialisation and language are some important manifestations.

*kadambapur, 6th century BCE. telengana.*



24 *menhir, probably with a burial chamber underneath*

The Megalithic burial sites themselves have a lot of variation. Some common sites could be classified in the following ways as quoted by Krishna Sastry. The Megalithic peoples had intermingled with the preceding Chalcolithic based on the knowledge of metallurgy among other things. Dr Krishna Sastry reports several clay furnaces to a height of one to one and half meters having blast holes with diameters ranging from 15 to 20 centimetres. Iron smelting complexes with enormous amounts of iron slag were found in many places of the Core Area. Some archaeologists suggest that iron technology evolved independently in the Core Area through constant play of carbon monoxide gas on iron -stones used for kilns to burn pottery. Iron ore is found in various parts in almost all formations from Dharwar to the Deccan trap laterites.

The objects that were found in excavations include daggers, knives, lances, and spearheads with barbs, arrowheads having both sockets and tangs along with swords of single and double edge. Qualitative iron ore deposits that are found in several areas of Telengana formed the base for a special quality of steel called 'wootz' (probably an early Roman word) used for swords. Iron is smelted in these places even to the present day. Agriculture received a boost with the entry of iron. The hard soil was now being tilled with ploughshares having iron hoes and points. Effective use of water through irrigation would have allowed a food surplus, which in turn saw the growth of trade within the Core Area and with the Gangetic plains by the end of the early phase of the Megalithic. The towns within the Core Area and the trade ushered an era of prosperity. The balance between agriculture for food security and trade surplus called for migration into the Coastal Zone.

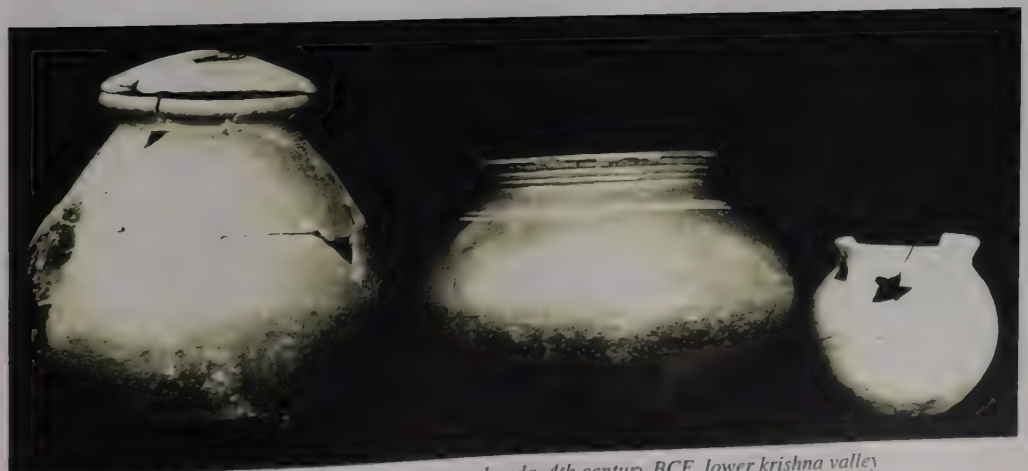
The Megalithic burial and habitation sites are dense in the Core Area comprising the earliest phase. Most of the habitation sites are in continuation with the Chalcolithic sites that agglomerated into urban centres during the secondary phase between 800 and 500 BCE. Burial sites exclusively are found in the transitory zones between the Core Area and the Coastal Zone after 500BCE in concurrence to the early historic phase, which proves migration of the Megalithic people from the Core Area. Market towns and transit points that make up the bulk of habitation sites found in the Core Area could have also existed in the central and southern parts of the Coastal Zone.

The gradual demise of trade after the 3rd century CE and eventual growth of agriculture could have dismembered habitation areas of the Megalithic and early historic ages into small towns and villages of the early medieval period in the coastal districts. Similar fate countered the urban settlements in the Core Area that were abandoned after the 3rd century of the Christian era. However since the spread of agriculture was less compared to the coastal areas Megalithic habitation sites in the Core Area remained partly intact.

It was during the Megalithic phase in the Core Area that the Aitreya Brahmana made its comment about how sage Viswamitra had banished his sons, the Andhras who were now living with the Pundra, Sabara, Pulinda, Mutiba and many others which it does not specify. In the light of new findings about the origin and spread of the Indo-Aryans it would be appropriate to view the word Andhra as a group of people who for sometime shared part of a common culture before the period of conservatism set in the form of the Brahmanas. Whether or not the Megalithic people are the Andhras of the Aitreya is not a much a matter. Roughly around the time of the Brahmanas the people who clustered into the Core Area were being called by that name which remained so after the primary phase of the Megalithic. All the four groups of people mentioned in the Aitreya appear in ancient literary sources during and after the Brahmana period and they definitely were living within the Core Area.

It is this Core Area encompassing Eastern Maharashtra, northern Karnataka, Rayalaseema, Telengana, southern parts of Chhattisgarh and the southeastern part of Orissa and the transitory parts of Rayalaseema and Telengana towards the Coastal Zone, which collectively were Ancient Andhra. By end of its primary phase Megalithic culture had made its way into most of present day Andhra Pradesh with the exception of the extreme coast and the districts of East and West Godavari, Vishakhapatnam, Vijayanagaram and Srikakulam districts. The twin republics of Assaka and Mulaka were established.

The Megalithic cultures of the extreme south had successfully integrated into the people speaking the southern Dravidian languages and formed the primary nucleus of ancient Tamil culture. Recent excavations



*megalithic grave: nagarjunakonda. 4th century BCE. lower krishna valley*

*labourer during the rice harvesting season; ramathirtham. north costal andhra*

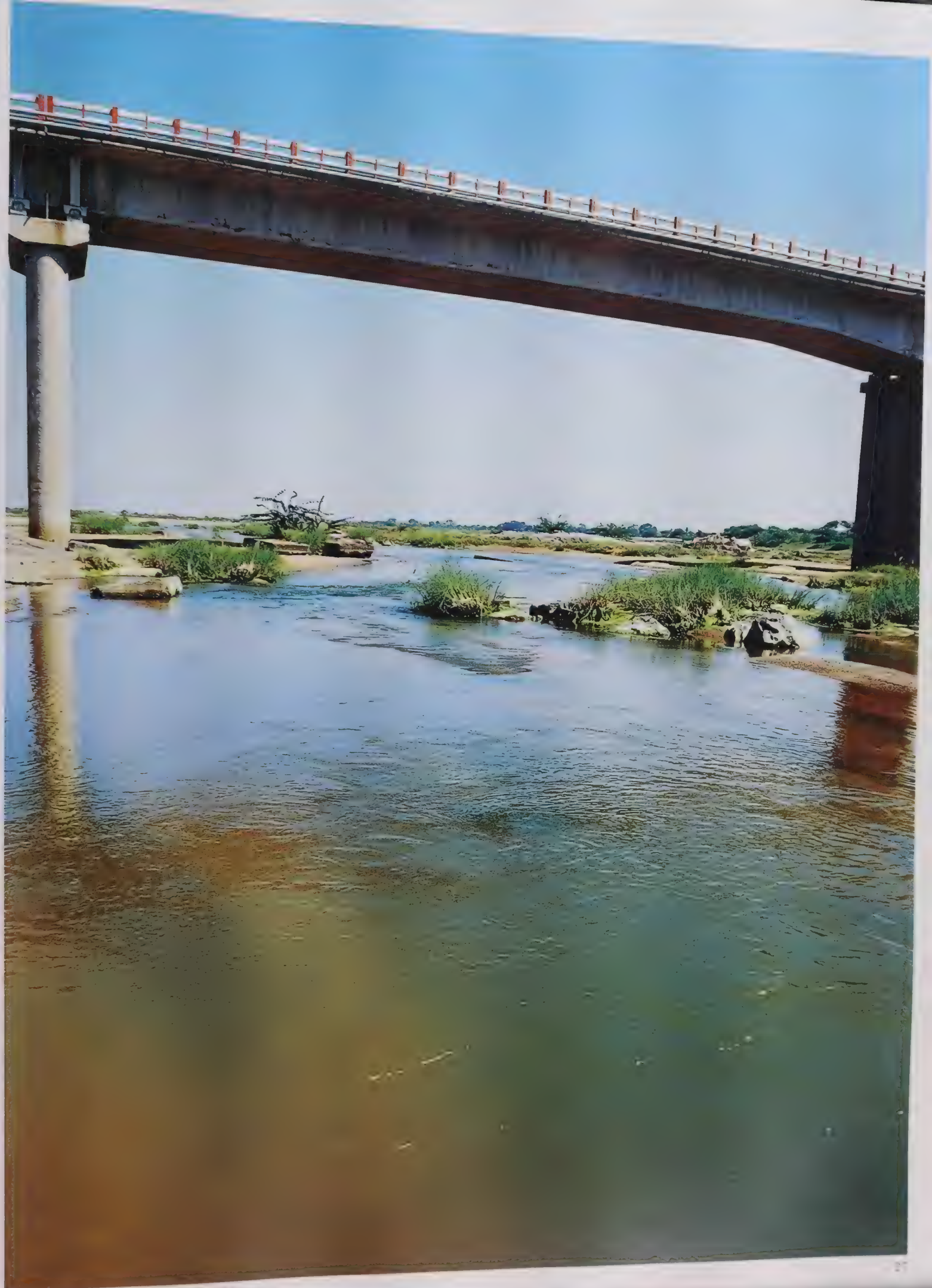
in Adichanallur in Tamilnadu have brought out foundations of a Megalithic town, which is currently being dated to the 6th Century BCE. Gradually the southern parts of Karnataka and the present state of Kerala merged into a cultural axis. Such a merger was not possible in Ancient Andhra for two distinct reasons among several others. The central and the south–central parts that formed Ancient Andhra acted as a buffer zone between the south and the north absorbing influences from both ends. Secondly, the large area of ancient Andhra with regional variations did not allow it to have a cultural uniformity as discrete as its Tamil counterpart especially in terms of language.

The influx of Megalithic people into Ancient Andhra probably brought in some form of Prakrit, which could have quickly developed a regional variant liberally influencing the middle Dravidian languages of the Chalcolithic people. For instance Mahrashtri Prakrit has a lot of loan words of Dravidian origin. The Megalithic people with their iron technology and urbanity might have dominated the preceding culture even linguistically. Although a very primitive form of Telugu could have been spoken in peripheral areas like the North-coastal districts, areas of south Rayalaseema and transitory areas towards Tamilnadu, it was only much after the decline of Megalithic culture and especially trade that the first Telugu inscriptions appear in the 5th century CE in a remote area of Rayalaseema.

**assaka and mulaka**

The land between the western Deccan and the middle course of the River Godavari is a vast semi-arid tract. This area was the nucleus of the only southern republican state before the emergence of imperial monarchy in the Gangetic plains. Since this zone was under the princely state of Hyderabad extensive archeologically explorations excavations started here only since the 1960's. Significant work was done in the Godavari belt of Karimnagar and Nizamabad districts through the 1970's and 80's under the then director of Andhra Pradesh State Department of Archaeology and Museums Dr. V.V Krishna Sastry. A large part of this treasured land is yet to be unravelled. Much of the references about its early historical period come from literary sources. Professor D.C Sircar sequenced these sources during 1940's and 50's. The area is referred to as Assaka and Mulaka, the twin republics mentioned amongst the sixteen Mahajanapadas. Tentatively, these two republics form the "Core Area" of ancient Andhra sometime after 7th century BCE during the middle-Megalithic period. Tribal confederacies of these areas probably merged to form a republic under the influence of burgeoning trade. By then, most of the republics in the Gangetic plain had direct trade links through the dense forests of central India across the Vindhya Mountains. Much of the culture found both in literary and archaeological records of Assaka and Mulaka have similarities with those found in early urban centres found at Kausambi, Sravasti, Takshasila and Magadha. The extent and the influence that these twin republics wielded are obscure. An effort using some of the literary sources and new research could be fruitful.

The Parayana, incorporated in the Suttanipatta speaks of a sage named Bavari who was originally an inhabitant of Sravasti who came to settle in the country of Assaka, in the vicinity of Mulaka on the banks of the Godavari. The venerable sage sent sixteen of his disciples to seek the



Buddha's teaching in person. While describing the sojourn a detailed route from Assaka to the Gangetic planes is mentioned. The disciples make their first stop at Pratistana, which is the modern Paitan on the Godavari in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra. Paitan was also the capital of Mulaka. The men then reached Mahismati on the Narmada and proceeded to Ujjaini, which was mentioned as the border between Dakshinapatha and Aryavarta. From Ujjaini they reached Sravasti where they met the Buddha who was staying there during a rainy season. This main trade route since the earliest times towards the south is was therefore established. Apart from this land route the eastern seaboard was also used along its western counterpart, although very rarely during this period. Another land route, which was established probably after the Kalinga war, is the present Chennai and Kolkata National Highway. Texts written throughout the ancient period in reference to the route south have always mentioned these stages the main route through Ujjaini as the most accessible. If there were new and shorter routes through the Vindhya, then it was largely due to the clearance of thick jungle.

The capital of Assaka was Paudanya or Potana. A variant of the form Potana is Potali that seems to be a mistake for Potani, which is a corruption of Paudanya through another intermediate form Podanya. Scholars have identified Paudanya with modern Bodhan in the Nizamabad district on the river Godavari abutting, on the Nanded district of Maharashtra. In a narrow sense, the Assaka country may therefore be identified as the Nanded-Nizamabad region jutting eastwards through Karimnagar and some parts of Warangal districts. Since the northern reaches of the area are densely forested, the dry plains drained by the river Godavari and its many tributaries must have been an ideal place for habitations. In ancient literature Assaka is often represented as including Mulaka, or the Paitan area of modern Maharashtra abutting on Kalinga, which is roughly speaking the coastal land between the rivers Mahanadi and Godavari, eastward of the thick Dandakaranya. Scholars have used most of these references, which place Vidarbha, Aparanta or north Konkan, and Avanti with its capital at Mahismati on the Narmada identified with Mandhata in the Nirmar district in Indore, Madhya Pradesh as the combined topography of Assaka and Mulaka.

This along with the areas mentioned in the Asokan edicts have prompted historians to consider both the twin republics with the Maharattas or Maharashtra in defiance of Andhra Pradesh. The nucleus of ancient Andhra was at that time located west from the modern Telangana towards Maharashtra. The present coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh were largely uninhabited. The movement of people and culture towards the coastal zone as mentioned earlier was rather late.

*panel: dhulikatta 2nd century BCE. telengana*

*detail from the distribution of the buddha's corporeal relics. fortification walls are noticeable to the right of the panel.*

Two Buddhist literary sources the Suttanipatta and the Cullakalinga Jataka are of much significance in determining the east and northeast inclines of the twin republics. It also establishes that there was prospering trade and a cultural influence along the thick forests from the present Telangana towards north coastal Andhra. According to Suttanipatta Assaka was ruled by a king of the same name whose might extended towards Kalinga. A capital city was formed on the seacoast to commemorate the extension of Assaka. This fort is widely identified as Dantavarapukota in the Srikakulam district or Dantapura as in the legends of the Buddha's tooth relic. Some decades ago remains of an immense fortification were found at Dantavarapukota. The examination of material culture in relation to its lowest layers gives it a date around 4th century BCE. Significantly, it is the most ancient fort to be found in the coastal districts of Andhra, if one could convincingly antedate the fortification found at Dharanikota or the ancient Dhanyakataka.

Apart from the Buddhist sources, a wealth of information comes from Greek sources dating back to the 3rd century BCE. Megasthenes a Seleucid ambassador based in Syria was posted ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya as part of a bilateral agreement between the Greek nobles and the Mauryan court. He left a valuable account of his observations called Indika. Unfortunately, the original was destroyed in a fire a few centuries later. However its main contents, which the observations are made by Megasthenes especially about the topography of kingdoms in contemporary India, were passed on to scribes who quoted him as an early and reliable source. The commentators of Megasthenes mention Andhra variously as Anddrea and Airhodei with thirty fortified cities and a large army rivalled only by the Mauryas. The names of the fortified towns are however not mentioned. Scholars have always strived to include early Buddhist sites and their habitation zones in the coastal districts as the probable identification of these ancient forts. A couple of ancient fortifications including Dantavarapukota in Srikakulam district and Dharanikota in Guntur district and Vengipura identified with the area around the villages Chinavegi and Pedavegi in West Godavari districts are quoted as being part of the thirty fortified towns. Archeologically all these areas have fortifications which can be dated sometimes during the early parts, or as in most other cases, the later part of the Satavahana regime if one were to ignore and surpass the latest chronology of the Satavahanas by P.V. Parabrahma Sastry (1980) and rest they are facts on earlier assumptions, then the fortifications would not be older then the 2nd century BCE. The fortified towns existed at least three hundred years prior the Satavahana realm. Secondly, the morphology of a fortified town or habitation put across in Vedic sources and upgraded later with modifications by the author of the Arthasastra have certain distinct characteristics and configurations which were put to use since Mauryan times. Some of these features can be summed up as follows:

1. The Pura or a fortified town consisted of one or several concentric circular ramparts.
2. It was built of mud and not stone
3. The fortification has combustible defences, which were probably palisades, wattle or prickly shrubs.
4. It was furnished with wooden sheds as living quarters
5. It was stacked with provisions, water and ford of cattle.
6. It was not permanently occupied but served mainly as a refuge in times of famine, pestilences apart from war.
7. The Pura or fortified wall required repair or rebuilding after each rainy season when the fortifications was loosened or completely fell to the ground.

*remnants of a fortification at dhulikatta.2nd BCE.telengana.*

We have no idea if the thirty fortified towns mentioned in Greek sources had these features. Neither can we take the account of Megasthenes for granted since these fortifications were built when Assaka and Mulaka were republican states and not imperial kingdoms where lineage was the base for monarchy. The thirty fortified towns probably were in between western Maharashtra and Telangana. The fortification at Dantapura was probably a very late feature of that era. The fortifications found at Dharanikota, Vengipura, Satanikota were of the Satavahana period. A team of scholars have recently teamed to seek the exact location of these ancient forts.

Like elsewhere in the Gangetic plains the twin republics of Assaka and Mulaka were based on the prosperity earned through trade. The Megalithic people as mentioned earlier went to great distances to form trading links within or outside their cultural zone. The same principle was followed when a nucleus was established around the twin republics. Apart from the zeal to establish trade posts in far flung areas a looming fact seems to be the physical extension of borders into the coastal districts. The Megalithic cultures have been sighted in the dry and un-forested zones of Krishna, Guntur, Nellore and Chittoor districts. During the early historic period within the realm of the twin republics, culture of the core area transmigrated into these new areas and there by established political states of a local nature. These political states were usually centred in urban zones headed by trade guilds in the formative phase and later by local chieftains.

A centralised political state seems highly improbable. There was also the local historical evolution of communities in and around the newly established urban centres to be taken under consideration. In most cases, the non-urban communities were coming under the agrarian fold were possibly under the sway of the political authority based in towns. The complex productive relationships and the concept of a republican state were threatened by the gradual growth of the imperial monarchy based at Pataliputra.

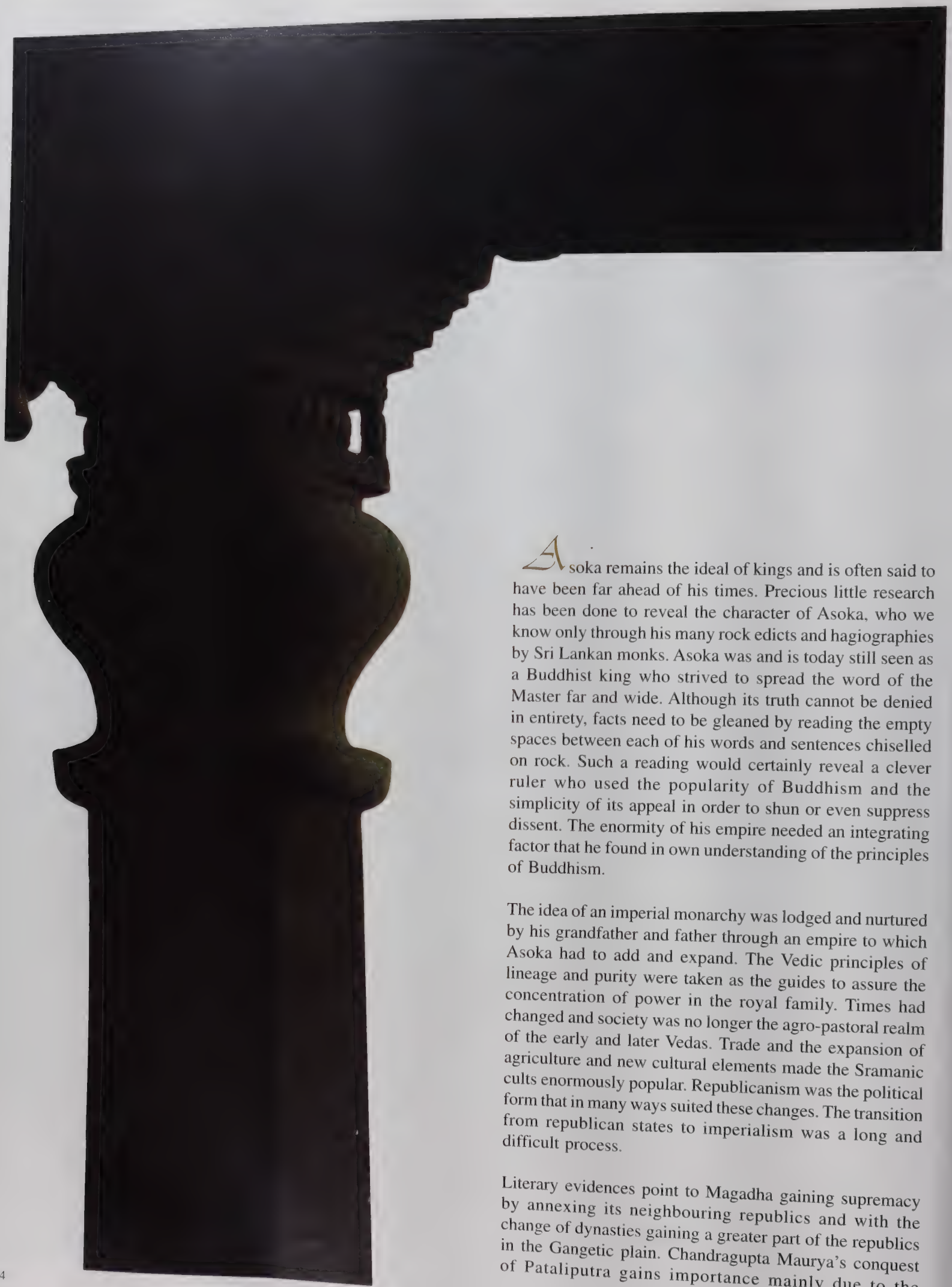
The exact date and nature of Magadhan supremacy extending towards the south is not known. Literary sources point to the Nandas and Sisunagas before them holding the reins of sea trade in the coastal area of the Ganga and the adjoining areas of Kalinga. But it was definitely during the early Mauryan emperors that Assaka, Mulaka and the new areas of attraction in the coastal district of Andhra Pradesh came under the hegemonic influence of Magadha. Perhaps the republics were allowed autonomy with the agreement of paying some sort of an annual tribute to the emperor at Pataliputra. There does not appear to be a great amount of friction between the last vestiges of republicanism and the Mauryan imperial monarchy, at least in its initial stage.

Punch-marked coins issued by travelling tradesmen within the Deccan keep surfacing in a large number even in the Mauryan layers. In fact the last two centuries before the advent of Asoka was the time of immense trade activity in almost all the areas, which constitute Maharashtra and the modern Andhra Pradesh. The combined reigns of Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara seem to have gone quiet uneventfully as far as ancient Andhra was concerned. The eastern seaboard described by Greek sources as the coast of Airhodei had bustling trade ports, which might not have been taxed by the Mauryan regime.

In a larger view, integration of the ancient Andhras with their Northern counterparts seems to be of a contractual nature. The political hold over Andhra as a region came about during Asoka's reign and specifically after the Kalinga war in his eight regnal year.

# *shadow of the monarch*

The Emperor of Magadha, Piyadassi Asoka, waged war sometime in 259 BCE on his neighbour Kalinga. The provocation is not known. His counterparts, no match to the might of the emperor, was never identified. The bloodshed was unprecedented. History remembers it as a war of transformation. The emperor was moved. He gave up his sword and found solace in the Buddha. Edicts were carved all through his empire espousing Dharma. Conscious was being evoked with the appointment of bureaucrats to monitor it. Festive gatherings, theatrical sacrifices, fairs and feasts were discouraged. The emperor's kitchen was clean from the blood of animals and birds. His tolerance was religious. His zeal was missionary. His harem was virtuous. The appearance of his birth star in the skies meant freedom for prisoners. Slaves of his land were loyal and their masters kind. His tree-lined roads were far and broad. He was father to his people and beloved to the gods.



Asoka remains the ideal of kings and is often said to have been far ahead of his times. Precious little research has been done to reveal the character of Asoka, who we know only through his many rock edicts and hagiographies by Sri Lankan monks. Asoka was and is today still seen as a Buddhist king who strived to spread the word of the Master far and wide. Although its truth cannot be denied in entirety, facts need to be gleaned by reading the empty spaces between each of his words and sentences chiselled on rock. Such a reading would certainly reveal a clever ruler who used the popularity of Buddhism and the simplicity of its appeal in order to shun or even suppress dissent. The enormity of his empire needed an integrating factor that he found in own understanding of the principles of Buddhism.

The idea of an imperial monarchy was lodged and nurtured by his grandfather and father through an empire to which Asoka had to add and expand. The Vedic principles of lineage and purity were taken as the guides to assure the concentration of power in the royal family. Times had changed and society was no longer the agro-pastoral realm of the early and later Vedas. Trade and the expansion of agriculture and new cultural elements made the Sramanic cults enormously popular. Republicanism was the political form that in many ways suited these changes. The transition from republican states to imperialism was a long and difficult process.

Literary evidences point to Magadha gaining supremacy by annexing its neighbouring republics and with the change of dynasties gaining a greater part of the republics in the Gangetic plain. Chandragupta Maurya's conquest of Pataliputra gains importance mainly due to the

amalgamation of the northwest, which he seems to have conquered prior to Magadha. Much of his reign seems to have been spent in reinforcing his success that was constantly threatened by Greek interference in the northwest. This must have led him to make peace with the representatives of Alexander through matrimonial alliances. The next major detail we know of Chandragupta Maurya was his renunciation of throne. Legend has it that he left Pataliputra with a sect of Jaina monks to live in penance at Sravana Belgola in Karnataka. The source of the legend is a Jaina text whose authenticity cannot historically be established. The next in line was Bindusara, who is said to have patronised the Ajivakas, a Sramanic sect that was equally popular along with Buddhism and Jainism. His reign seems to have been largely peaceful but for an uprising in the northwest that was suppressed by Asoka on the orders of his father.

Asoka ascended the throne after a civil war of four years. His brothers, who may have been the legitimate heirs, probably challenged him. Eventually, around 269 BCE he became the emperor. The next decade of his regime was spent entirely in expanding his kingdom. Kalinga at the time was probably an autonomous region in the Mauryan empire to which it was paying an annual tribute. Since, around the 3rd Century BCE Kalinga was contiguous or even part of Ancient Andhra; it would have had a republican polity with traders having a huge stake in its fortunes since it was the period when sea-trade was beginning to expand and prosper.

Asoka may have invaded Kalinga to capture the sea-trade that would have been immensely useful to the huge empire. The bloodshed would have been a focused effort to terrorise the Andhras and the other kingdoms in the Deep South into submission. The ploy seems to have worked in Asoka's favour. Asoka patronised the Buddhist monks almost immediately after the fall of Kalinga. Initially it was through carving rock-cut caves for their monsoon retreats as in the example of Lomasa Rishi and Sudama caves at Barabar. Gradually he won their favour. From the 12th regnal year he issued rock edicts all over his vast kingdom. The Persian king Darius who issued similar edicts although in different context seems to be the inspiration. These edicts were carved on rock and on pillars specially erected for such purpose. The areas of the inscriptions were specially chosen. Most of them were on or between roads to culturally significant zones, areas where people would gather to sell and buy, which were not always market places in the conventional sense. The edicts were mostly written in the language that the people in the area understood. If that was not the case translators were appointed. On a given day they were read out to people who might have found appeals such as being good to parents and old people, to be kind with animals and the discouragement of local forms of culture like offerings and sacrifices excruciatingly weird, especially in areas such as Andhra where an imperial State structure was being witnessed for the first time.

The reasons behind the issuing of edicts apart from the apparent ethical dimension had a strong political tone. The edicts were announcing to bewildered people who had no idea of the existence of such people as the "Officers in charge of Morality and Human Values" or the local chiefs who were appointed to mitigate crises between the followers of different cults. The edicts were acquainting them with the State in a very placid manner while the fact was that the people were no longer the borderless who would pitch at any place and start life the way they wanted. The routine of ordinary people probably was bureaucratised to the point of sharply dividing personal life against the public sphere and vice-versa that in normal circumstances would have accommodated religion or cult activity. Asoka probably envisaged the growth of religious authority parallel to the State that could sow trouble sprouting into open dissent, not rare in his day.

We have already mentioned one such rebellion that Asoka personally suppressed during his father's reign. The reason for the seizure of public domain was also probably the fear of trade-guilds that had grown strong during the preceding republican era and they were yet to come to terms with the imperial monarchy. Their influence was immense and were, probably quick to take advantage of the slightest sign of weakness within the monarchy. Obviously, monarchy was not the political form that could accommodate the growing aspirations of the trading classes. Moreover, the tradesmen were provincial heavy weights who could not bear a centralised administration. Tradesmen were also the chief patrons of the Sramanic cults including Buddhism. In comparison to the Jainas and the Ajivakas the Buddhists were relatively more popular and widespread. Asoka knew the gravity of the situation all too well and was quick to respond.

The Buddhists, by Asoka's time, were divided evenly over the way the Dharma should be carried forward. The Mahasanghikas, a faction of the original order had deified the Buddha and were fairly successful in Andhra. Much of the original order that remained in the Gangetic plains was deeply divided over issues of discipline. The challenge of the Buddhist hierarchy was to spread across the entire sub-continent without losing what it perceived as the original teaching of the Buddha. The travelling monks found this a daunting task since cultures were varied and had their own belief systems in place. Initially Asoka seems to have patronised the monks cutting across sectarian lines and strived to unite them. His efforts apparently did not go well

with the monks. The first two Buddhist councils were already held and Asoka convened a third council without perhaps inviting the Mahasanghikas or their breakaway factions.

The third Buddhist council held under the auspices of Moggaliputta Tissa at Pataliputra cannot conventionally be called a council since only the sects and orders that had similarity of opinion were convened. The idea probably was to bring about a permanent set of rules and a supporting set of arguments from the existing oral cannon attributed to the Buddha. Schisms were prohibited and were made punishable by banishment from the order. The cannon was revised and authenticated. Commentaries and interpretation of the new cannon were made legitimate as long as it did not bring a huge divide in the order. Asoka on his part unearthed the corporeal remains of the Buddha from the eight places where it was distributed and divided it into minute proportions which in turn were distributed all over the sub-continent. The move might have been made to legitimise the claim of the Mahasanghikas of the Buddha's transcendental nature, while retaining the difference in issues that seem superficial. Along with these changes Asoka must have focused effort on giving Buddhism its physical form; the monastery, which in later times grew to become the temple of the faithful Buddhists. The institutionalisation was now complete.

Politically, the institutionalisation was a huge success. Dissent could now be effectively contained and the tradesmen had to put themselves under the emperor. A mass religion with the commonness of character could assure both strength and legitimacy. But the Dharma that the emperor sought and preached has a smart difference which scholars and laymen alike today get confused with while calling Asoka a Buddhist king. The concerns of the emperor were beyond those of a common Buddhist. He had to hold an empire without resorting to bloodshed and active suppression. The charter that he called Dharma was on the face of it a much-generalised code of ethics and principles cutting across the religious lines. Asoka appears more a clever and benevolent emperor than an idealised Buddhist that he is often made out to be. Organised religion was not the Buddha's answer to human misery. Buddhism as an institution was therefore serving a purpose beyond seeking and realizing Nirvana.

*...asokan inscription: erragudi rupadasi ema*

Asoka set a precedent that was actively emulated by the later Mauryans and the dynasties that were to follow them. Buddhism was definitely not an effective way of legitimacy that monarchy sought through its patronization. The king of the early historic period was only using the popularity of the Buddhists among the populace and especially with the trading classes to their advantage. In fact none of the Sramanic cults had the mythical base needed to perpetuate legitimacy. During the Mauryan regime the emperors after Asoka and patronized the Jainas and the Ajivakas probably in their own endeavour to gain the status of Asoka. The later Mauryans are not known to history with the exception of a few inscriptions and passing mention in Sri Lankan chronicles.

Actually the exact successor of Asoka is still a matter of debate. The weak inheritors of Asoka and their obvious failure to hold the empire together could have been one reason why the later kings mainly the Sungas openly promoted the cause and ideals of the Vedic age. A trend soon emerged in accordance to the need for legitimacy of the kings to patronise the Brahmins and their rituals. The Buddhists though not patronised in official terms were given all the benefits that they were receiving during the days of Asoka. This tendency was initially restricted to the north and northwest of the sub-continent by soon imperial monarchy took root in the south and specifically in the Deccan when the Satavahanas established their reign.

By then the Buddhism of the early monastic kind had strongly established itself in costal areas of the Deccan in the present Andhra Pradesh and Maharasthra. The present north coastal Andhra Pradesh comprising the districts of Srikakulam, Vijayanagaram, Vishkapatanam and the East Godavari district were in the Mauryan times part of Kalinga. A large number of Buddhist monasteries were established in the last decade of the 3rd century BCE and the first quarter of the 2nd Century CE. These monasteries probably had direct links with the Buddhist establishments in Magadha. With the exception of a few cases the local populations supported most of the monasteries, which is also evidence to the popularity of the Stupa cult. In the area south of the Godavari towards Krishna, Guntur and Prakasam districts the Mahasanghikas and their successors were more popular. The south coastal parts of Andhra Pradesh also had major urban centres unlike the north. The Megalithic people and the other tribes residing in the plains of the lower Krishna valley were quickly integrating into early state structures. Buddhism provided the precise religious base for such integration. Access to the core areas in Telengana and Vidarbha was helped through a network of trade routes. The coastal districts became an area of attraction and Buddhism was developing fast as the faith bypassing,as it seems, the specific identities of the people.

In the western Deccan the granite hills were being carved into monasteries, which were patronised by the trading classes that sought the ports established along the coast. Soon trade with Egypt and Rome was thriving and both western and eastern seaboards were connected by trade routes passing through important Buddhist establishments. The time was ripe for the establishment of an empire on the lines of the Mauryas. The ambitious representatives of the Magadhan monarchy soon declared independence. But the exact date of the establishment of the Satavahanas is huge historical debate, which has divided scholarship into locating the founder of the Satavahana dynasty Chimuka anywhere between 230 and 30 BCE.

*the mythical bull personifying power; nasik. 1st CE. western deccan.*

### the satavahanas

The main sources of the Satavahana period are the Puranas that were compiled between the late 3rd century of the Christian era to the 4th and the early part of the 5th. The Puranas were not all compiled at once nor were they done at a single place. They contain among other things the lists of kings to have ruled in the various regions of the sub-continent. The historical accuracy of most of these Puranic listing of kings was questioned during the colonial period but eventually a far more empathetic reading of the traditional perception of history has made the Puranas a good source for reconstructing the past despite the discrepancies in chronologies. Conflicting theories arose amongst scholars since the turn of the twentieth century about the Satavahana date and origin. The duration of the dynasty is 460 years according to the Matsya Purana, 456 according to the Brahmanda, 411 according to the Vayu and 300 according to the Vishnu Purana. Scholars like R.G.Bhandarkar attribute the difference due to some Puranas treating concurrent reigns from different capitals as successive. According to others the discrepancy arises from the same Puranas treating the duration of the Satavahana dynasty from its beginning and others reckoning it from the close of the Kanva rule. These scholars, Smith importantly, feel that the expatriation of

40 rock cut corridor in a monastery, nasik 1st CE. Western deccan

the Kanva rule by a later Satavahana has been attributed to its founder and therefore reducing the period by at least 200 years. There is also the problem of inclusion of the branch lines of the Satavahanas who had ruled from different places and at different times to the main line which extends the history of its rule by nearly 150 years more then as would have been the case. Scholars like Raychaudhuri felt that if the main line of Satavahana kings consisted of about nineteen princes and if their durations were three centuries then there would be no difficulty in acknowledging the Puranic statement that Chimuka, the founder of the Satavahana dynasty had killed his master Susarma sometime in the 1st century BCE and started his own lineage. Satakarni mentioned in an inscription at Girnar in Gujarat by Rudradaman around 150 of the Christian era. The Satavahana inscriptions dated only in the regnal years, though eras were not wanting at least for later kings.

The Puranic regnal periods and the total for the whole dynasty are vitiated by internal discrepancies, and did not always square with the epigraphic testimony while Satakarni seems to be a title borne with or without a personal name by the many kings of the lineage. There were other problems too. The Satavahanas were always referred by the Puranas as Andhra Satavahanas or Andhras in short. Scholars immediately started finding proof or parallels with evidences found within the territory of the present day Andhra Pradesh. While other scholars like Sukthankar, Mirashi and Raychaudhri amongst others vehemently opposed the identification of the Satavahanas with the word Andhra.

**the problem**

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the word Andhra was not a uniform name for a specific race or geographical unit. It was a word being used by those outside a certain territory referred by that name. The territorial nature of the word was itself historically transitory. Initially, the Andhras are said be residing along with several other tribes between central and south central India and then they were located in the twin republics of Assaka and Mulaka according to the early Buddhist texts and then as living outside the boundaries of the Mauryan empire along with Pitanakas, Satyaputras, Keralaputras, Bhojakas and the Rattakas. The location of the Andhras kept shifting even after the Satavahanas. The first epigraphic evidence comes in the form of the Mydavolu copper plates of the Pallava king Sivaskanda Varma placed in the early parts of the 3rd century of the Christian era. He refers to Dhannakataka or Dhanyakataka being the headquarters of the Amdhapatha or Andhra Patha. The Andhra of the period succeeding the Pallavas included the north coastal districts of the present Andhra Pradesh up to the present Nellore district, which at that time was known as the Kammaratta or Karamarashtra. Copper plates recovered from Srirangam in Tamilnadu dated 1358 give Andhra an immense geographical dimension bounded in the north by Kanyakubja or Kannuj of the later times, on the west by Maharashtra, the east by Kalinga and the south by southern districts of Tamilnadu, which the inscription refers to as Pandyaka.

Incidentally, the Satavahanas have never used the word Andhra anywhere in their inscriptions even in those found in the state of Andhra Pradesh. It would therefore be logical to conclude that Andhra was a word coined and used to refer to a people, area or culture within the vast area of the Deccan by those living in the Aryavarta or north and northwest India of the historical times. The Deccan or Dakshina Desa would obviously include the areas of Maharasthra, north Karnataka, Chattisgarh, southern Orissa and some parts of north Tamilnadu and the whole area of the present Andhra Pradesh. It would also be proper to refer the present population of Andhra Pradesh as Telugus implying that Andhra may or may not be synonymous with Telugu due to its rather late origin.

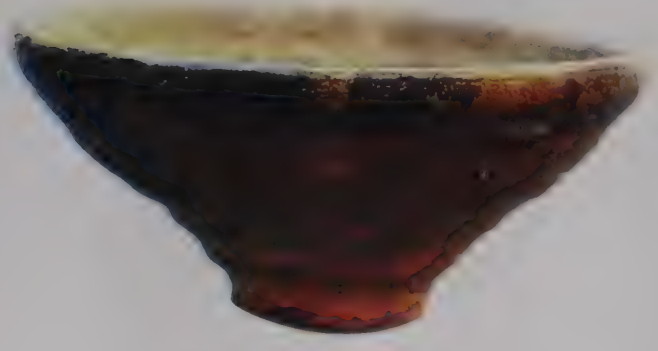
In 1978 during excavation at Kotalingala in Karimnagar, a mud fortification was laid bare belonging to the Mauryan era. The site that is now a village situated upon the ancient debris also yielded lead and potin coins containing the legends of a certain Gobhada, Samagopa, and Sirikamavaya. Along with these coins were found those of Chimuka Sata, the first king of the Satavahanas according to the Puranic listing, along with the royal insignia of the Satavahanas, which is also called the Ujjaini symbol from the place where the fist numismatic evidence of the dynasty were gathered. It was the first time that the coins of the dynasty's originator were found. The coins of Chimuka, or Sri Mukha in Sanskrit, were found in the layers above those in which the aforementioned were found. The other coins were found in the layers succeeding the Mauryan era. On palaeographic grounds, the coins of Gobhada, Samagopa or Swami Gopa and Sirikamavaya could date to the late Sunga period or the period of the Kanvas and the coin of Chimuka in linear succession. Dr Puccha Vasudeva Parabrahma Sastry, then the assistant director of the Andhra Pradesh State Department of Museums and Archaeology and one of the greatest experts on south Indian epigraphy drew a theory that was to challenge all the established theories on the origin of the Satavahanas. Since the Puranas in unison mention that Chimuka had killed his master Susarma the last of the Kanvas to establish a new lineage, the new physical evidence was used.

In a nutshell it meant that Gobhada, Samagopa and Sirikamavaya were representatives of the Kanvas in the Deccan who were based at Kotalingala and Chimuka was

a contemporary or nearly so of at least one of them. It also implies that Chimuka must have been high ranking official within the Kanva administration apart from the fact that he was a native. Chimuka must have taken advantage of the weak king of Magadha and killed him in a battle after which, he declared himself king of a new dynasty that ruled from the Telangana region. The area that he took charge of would have included much of Maharastra, where the later kings or he himself established a base in Pratistana or Paitan, the ancient capital of Mulaka.

Going by the strength of this argument one may suppose that the ancestors of Chimuka belonged to a family called Satavahanas who were the regional representatives of the Mauryan kings probably since Asoka. This loyalty may have continued even after the Mauryas through the combined regimes of the Sungas and Kanvas. With the establishment of lineage as the base for monarchy it would not have been improbable for high-ranking officials of the monarchy to have their own lineages as such. Since it was an established fact that Chimuka and Susarma of the Kanva dynasty were contemporaries it would reasonable to place Chimuka at around 30 BCE.

The main line of the Satavahanas initially ruled from Pratistana when they were lords of the entire western Maharasthra and Andhra Pradesh along with parts west and northwest of the River Narmada, which are roughly the areas that were the main stages from the Deccan towards the Gangetic Plain since ancient times. The successor of Chimuka, a certain Satakarni might have briefly occupied Magadha when the dynasty was in its peak glory. The Satavahanas seem to have faced reverses with the expansion of the Sakas to whom they had to loose the western provinces in Maharasthra, during which time they might have made Dhamnakadaka or Dhanyakataka, which was already a flourishing trade centre in their eastern province, the capital. But then, if the Satavahanas were to be located in the last quarter of the 1st century BCE then one would have to resolve the unattainable list of kings numbering up to 33 in combination of all the Puranas put together. The physical evidence for such a long list of king is disobliging with the knots getting clumsier as one stoops to identify at least the kings of the main line.



*an early satavahana coin; (down) a red ware bowl; 1st century CE*

**the culture angle**

The significance of establishing a rational chronology of the Satavahanas lay in the fact that some of the largest Buddhist establishments in Western Maharasthra and modern Andhra Pradesh were patronized during their regime. Further, the cultural unity of the Buddhist epoch of the early historic period between the regions continuous with eastern and the western seaboards seems to be of immense importance. In real terms the Satavahanas were neither champions of Buddhism like Asoka in his own right, nor were they Buddhists themselves. With the exception of the revilio statues and inscriptions at Nanaghat, the bulk of Satavahana epigraphs come from donatives made to monasteries. Interestingly, all of these inscriptions carved on the walls of Buddhist monasteries speak of the kings being followers of the Vedic legacy, complete with royal titles to that effect. The socio-religious angle of the Satavahana times invariably is Buddhist-centric. The origin and date of the Satavahanas notwithstanding, there is unity of opinion that they ruled over vast tracts of land and during prosperous times. By the end of the Satavahana period the three-way division of the means of production in the early historic period is firmly established. The towns and larger urban centres with flourishing trade, the hinterlands with villages with an agrarian base and the areas that fall outside the sphere of political power were hunter-gatherer communities. The corpus of Buddhist inscriptions found throughout Deccan attest to the huge popularity of the Dharma equivocally amongst the urban population.

The hinterlands with the remnant belief systems of the late Neolithic seem to have adapted the various ritual cults that were starting to make their presence in Buddhism, during and after the early monastic phase. The early cults of mother-goddess worship and some forms of the Saiva religion make their initial appearances. The hunter-gatherers were not isolated in religious terms. Monasteries were being built in the vicinity of the forests and some elements of tribal religion are manifested in the sculptures at Dhanyakataka and Nagarjunakonda. The inter-relation of the three cultural variations achieved its utmost significance during the realm of the Satavahanas. The Deccan and the Deep South were still at an integrating phase where identity was still being associated with traditional affinities of the past. Cohabitation, intermingling and adaptive sustenance associated with proto-historic phase seems strong. The presence of mother-goddess and early Saiva cults parallel to the growth and spread of Buddhism attest this. In fact the view that the ritualism of early

*fortified pillar remnant of the satavahana period repaired and used during the later eras; bodhan. telengana.*

monastic Buddhism was a manifestation of these cults need not necessarily be true. The Mahasanghikas with their theme of the Buddha as supra mundane had already established themselves. The influence, however, of these cults and their idealised expression in the Mahayana phase cannot be denied, which again is a demonstration of the malleability of Buddhism and not always an illustration of variance with those cults.

Once it was institutionalised the spread of Buddhism was very quick. The Satavahana period saw the growth of Mahayana, which furthered Buddhism into new areas with increasing laity. The massive establishments needed prolonged patronage that the Gahapatis provided. The importance of the Gahapatis as an economic support system to the monarchy can be recognised as the reason behind the tolerance of the Buddhism. The early Satavahana kings especially Chimuka seem to have been followers of Sramanic cults. Jaina texts claim Chimuka's devotion to that cult. He seems to have abandoned his faith in favour of the Brahmanic religion once he crowned himself. Irrespective of this above reference there is ample reason to believe that the early kings of the line or at least their queens were followers and patrons of Sramanic cults due to the sheer influx and influence of these cults during that period in the Deccan. The later kings however clearly show their faith in the Saiva religion attested mostly by their names. Tolerance as clearly demonstrated by Asoka was a politically lucrative proposition to the kings.

Preference for a particular religion and the suppression of the others was bound to result in reverses at some stage or the other. By and large, tolerance seems the hallmark of the early historic period.

**trade**

There seems to be been a perfect continuity from the Megalithic into the Early historic period in terms of trade. The most exhaustive archaeological record emerges from the Karimnagar and Nizamabad areas of Andhra Pradesh where Krishna Sastry (1983) brought to light a number of sites belonging to the Megalithic and succeeding early historical period. He makes a meticulous record of the objects found at various levels. From the layers roughly dated to the 6th and 5th centuries before the Christian era rare types of black and red ware that included chalices and bough bowls on hallow pedestals with or without slits appear in both habitation and burial sites. The other varites of pottery include deep bowls, black conical lids, tunnel shaped lids, ground shape vessels with narrow necks and visage pots with three perforations. These are distinctly local. Recent excavations at Adichannalur in Tamilnadu of the same period are quite different despite the fact that they are categorised in the same culture. There occurs a shift in the refinement of material culture as can be deduced by this example. It may also be noted that this shift seen in the larger context would mean that the Megalithic cultures were slowly transcending to the historical epoch. Ironically, very

different sets of references are used for the classification of the historic period like the occurrences of inscriptions, the emergence of dynasties or a political class and their mention in literary sources. Somehow trade and the refinement of the modes of production are to be given the utmost importance weather or not with the usal measure of references. An immense sophistication can found in metal in the period following the 4th century BCE up to the Mauryan layers.

A large number of copper objects were found that included ferrules or casings for weapons like daggers, lances and swords. Several varieties of bells and cups were found along with copper bowls, rattles, corriliyum rods, bangles and rings. The instances of iron are mattocks without shaft holes, stirrups, chisels, arrowheads, horse bits, curb chains, rivets and nails. Gold and silver objects are profuse at the Mauryan levels and achieve sophistication around the end of that period. The objects include earrings, spools, studs, bracelets, necklaces, and waistbands of simple design. Silver objects seem far more varied that includes lamp stands, ornamental ware and punch marked coins usually in hoards. Silver punch marked coins minted in this area may have found their way into the newly developed urban centres of the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. Alexander Rea notes in his report the marking of silver coins found at the Stupa in Bhattiprolu. These coins bear resemblances in shape, size and design with those found at various places in Telengana and Vidarbha. Similar coins were found at Vaddamanu and Dhanyakataka marking these sites contemporaneous to Bhattiprolu. If the above-mentioned facts are of any indication to the growth of trade at a cumulative pace then one could say that it reached a zenith with the inclusion of the maritime trade ushering in a prosperous era.

Trade during the Mauryan and preceding eras was strengthened with the development of seaports, from which the Satavahanas benefited immensely. Ports like Soparaka or Sopara and Brahukhuccha on the western seaboard was being used since the Mauryan times, the eastern seaboard was also put to use. A number of seaports were established along the coastline of Andhra Pradesh. Soon trade with Southeast Asia was gaining pace. Suvarnabhumi the generic name for Burma and Malaysia went on to become the most traded country during the Satavahana epoch. Entire colonies were set up there carrying the first phase of Andhra culture to those lands. The Sumatra archipelago, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia were also witness to the growing influence of cultural elements from Andhra. Sri Lanka had already become a part of the maritime route on the eastern and western seaboards even during the Mauryan regime. The sea trade brought in two advantages that the Mauryans did not have. Maritime trade was in its initial

*an embellished water jar from the satavahana period; 1st century CE. lower krishna valley.*

stages during the Mauryans and it potential was tapped only in a partial manner with Kalinga and ports in the mouths of the Ganga.

The Satavahanas were able to capture the entire peninsular India and had the advantage of both the seaboards along with the inland trade. Secondly, the Satavahanas were ruling an area that was relatively lesser in area then that of the Mauryans while there were areas where they ruled through their feudatories. This would have reduced the burden of administrative spending and welfare that the Mauryas had laid base to. Military threat was minimized to the period of Saka invasion and the brief takeover in the western parts of the kingdom. The prosperity of the Hellenistic world between the 4th and 1st centuries before the Christian era made its inroads into south India during the Satavahana period. The Greek invasion of Persia and the rise of urbanisation into farther ends of the Indian sub-continent saw the appearance of trade routes since the beginning of the Mauryan era. The ports of Brahukhuccha and Sopara of the Mauryan era were supplemented by a string of harbours along the western seaboard. Active trade reached its peak in 45 of the Christian era when Hippalus discovered that Monsoon winds were favourable to sail in the Arabian Gulf and towards the Indian Ocean. The result was an enormous growth in the volume of trade that was to last at least for the next two hundred years.

The Andhra country was flooded with Roman Denarius and Aureaus coins. Roman wine, copper, tin, lead, corals, topaz, muslins, cloves, multi-coloured girdles, singing boys, women for the harem, highly embellished silver and gold ware and the most exquisite lavender and olive oil were the imports. The lists of exports however outweigh the imports. They mostly included Agate, jasper, carnelian, beryl, cotton clothes, plantains, peacock feathers, elephants, animal hides, furs, rice, coconut produce, sandalwood, camphor, musk and a very special quality of steel called wootz. The increase in trade brought in a great wealth and the Satavahana coffers were full. This attracted the attention of the Sakas who captured the entire western Deccan and the Kshatrapa rule was established with Nahapana and his son-in-law Ushavadatta at the helm of affairs.

The foreign occupation made the Satavahanas to recede east where they established a capital at Dhamnakadaka or Dhanyakataka, which is the modern Amaravati. To the existing ports at Kalingapatanam and Corringa were added the ports of Dontukurru, Machilipatnam, Ghantasala or Kantakosala, Chinna Ganjam, Kollitippa, Nagapattanam and Arikamedu near Pondicherry. The Kshatrapa rule was not to last long. Gotamiputta Satakanni put an end to the reign of Nahapana and Ushavadatta by defeating and killing them in battle. The Satavahana Empire now extended from

coast to coast with the added advantage of ports on the eastern seaboard too.

The whole scenario led to a class called the Gahapatis who seem to have owned land alongside trade. The raise of the Gahapatis had its origin in the Mauryan era but in a very different dimension. The Gahapatis, who were also known from Jaina Prakrit text as Gahavai, probably had their origin in the eastern expansion of when communities outside the domain were integrated into the mainstream. These new elements seem to have been involved in trading in the proto-historic stage and they perhaps continued their occupation with the added advantage of being part of a large culture zone. The Brahmanas talk about these traders of 'impure origin' as being dangerous to the existence of humankind just because they were traders. Probably the forerunners of the Gahapatis were not into agriculture and continued trading, which is contrast to the usual pattern of sustaining on land when trade was yet to become a flourishing reality. The entire trading community may however not be confused with the forerunners of the Gahapatis.

There were others who took to trade where land was the base of surplus that initiated trade and once established land quickly became a secondary source of income and was leased out. Moreover the pace of urbanization in the Gangetic plains and the northwest of India were far greater when compared to the Deccan, where land was being tilled since the early Neolithic times without the phases of occupation exemplified with eastward mobility of the proto-historic times in north India.

The agrarian culture had deeper root to the south of Vindhya despite its prolific adaptation to trade. Conflicts between the two modes of production seem improbable for two reasons. Primarily, the respective areas of attraction are distinct and trade was a phenomenon that took root much later in the cultural evolution of society in the Deccan. Secondly, trade was the cultural medium through which Iron seems to have spread making large tracts of land arable. Food security for the growing urban centres during the early historic period paved way to agro-based trade, which during the Satavahana period gave rise to the Gahapatis, who thrived on the export of agricultural produce within and outside the country. The clear division in focus lessens the possibility of conflict at least until the period when trade was flourishing. Another important reason for prospects of interdependence in the modes of production was the slow accreditation of caste. Although caste hegemony was a late feature even in the Gangetic plain and the northwest the economic complexities due to the growth of imperialism had given way to a dissonance manifested in the initial phases of caste.

moonlight on the abodes

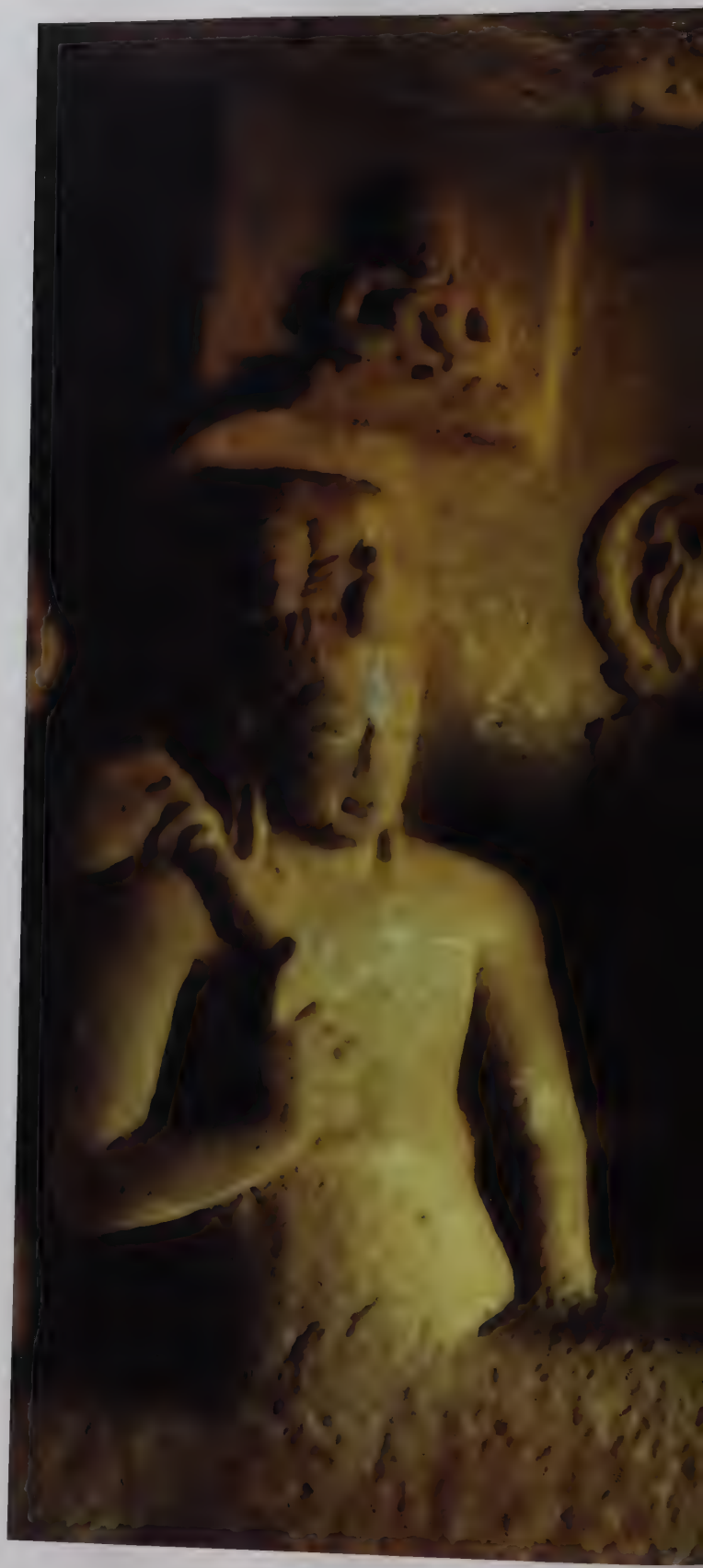
The appeal and popularity of Buddhism were actually rooted in a ritual culture that is often ignored at the behest of its epistemological ideals. Religion as an organised institution and its popularity is often mismatched with its central idea in assessing its popular appeal or a lack of it. From the data currently available on Buddhism there is overwhelming evidence to point out that the Buddhist monastery in terms of the dwelling of monks and their pursuit of Buddhist ideals was largely different from the laity that was patronising Buddhism, it seems solely on the merit of rituals.

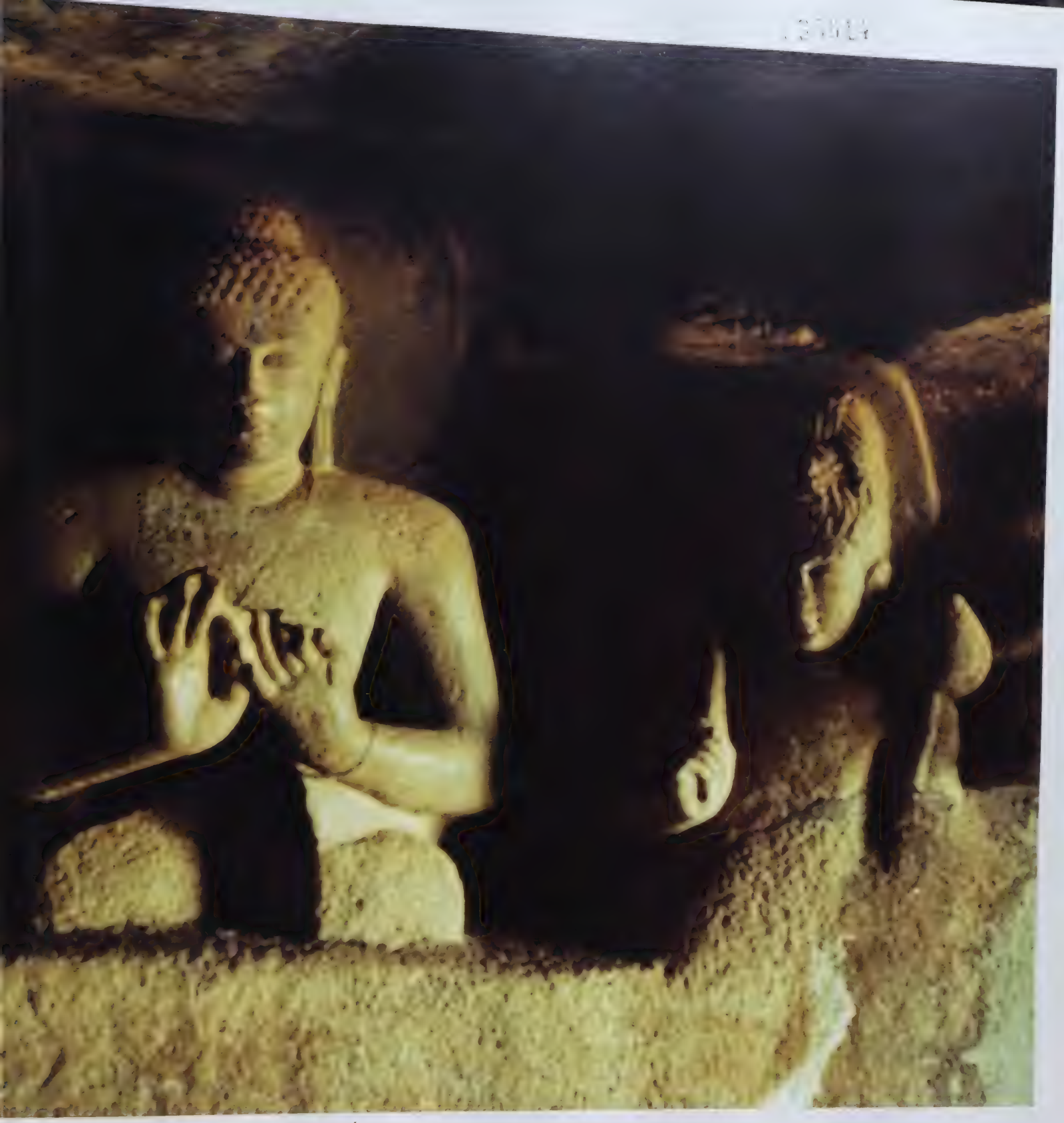
Buddhism is a Sramanic sect. The Buddha was a follower of an ancient lineage. He rationalised Sramanic thought of his times to infuse it with new ideas and a better understanding of contemporary society. The earliest versions of his teachings roughly coincide with the institutionalisation of Buddhism under Asoka. Buddhism prior to that is one the most obscure component in its entire history. The main teachings of the Buddha have been classified into three divisions. The Suttapitaka, or the dialogues and discussions that the Buddha seemed to have had in person followed by the Vinaya or the code of discipline laid down for monks and laity. Added to these two was the Abhidhamma or philosophic speculation or justification of the above two.

The Abhidhamma seems to have been of a much later origin. Going by the Suttapitaka the Buddha did not seem to have a religious institution as part of his ideal. Most of the dialogues or discussions were to dispel ignorance and establish a rational way of thinking based on the four noble truths and the eight-fold path, which was the crux of his teachings. The sermons that he gave in public domain were a greater simplification of the same. If we were to take the Suttapitaka more or less as an accurate historical source to the ideas of the Buddha it becomes clear that mass liberation was not the aim of the original Buddhist teaching. It simply meant that by using the tools of rationality, contemplation and conduct individuals could chart their own respective liberation based on their experience of life.

The Suttapitaka also marks a variance in the tone of the Buddha. He seems to have employed specific scales of logic in accordance to the person whom he was addressing. The sermons however were contextualised generalisations. The later monastic codes are unanimous in saying that the teaching were not canonised during the lifetime of the Buddha. In the light of the above expositions one can be extremely sure that 'spreading the word' did not mean missionary activity of an organised religion but in fact meant spreading awareness or conscious. It would also mean that the tools evolved by the Buddha were to be employed ingeniously by the monks who were revered as his direct disciples. The word disciple is not a hierarchical relation between seeker and giver. In all probability the disciples were elder or younger contemporaries of the Buddha who chose to live with him and cannot be equated to institutional patronage that took root with the rise of imperialism. The reason why the Buddha chose to associate himself with the likes of Bimbisara and Anathapindaka was probably as part of an inclusive process.

There are varied ideas as to the meaning of observing a four-month hiatus during the rainy season when monks were to stay in a sheltered zone. The observance of Vassavasa seems to have been an ancient Sramanic practice that was followed by all the sects. There is no historical evidence to rock-cut caves or freestanding monasteries that could be dated to the Buddha. There is also no data to suppose that some king or trader commissioned such structures on the request by the Buddha. The Buddha and his followers probably lived in natural caverns which dot the area that he wandered in Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh and the foothills of the Himalayas. We know all the places where the Buddha had observed the Vassavasa from the





*the buddha preaching; ellora 4th century CE. western deccan.*

time of his self-realisation to his death. Some of these natural caverns, especially the one at Rajagiha, that he somehow took a liking for, were later extended into monasteries during the time of Asoka.

From the above observations it seems highly improbable that the Buddha ever conceived a code of discipline for an order of monks who did not exist as such in the first place. Nonetheless one cannot deny the existence of some ground rules that were probably part of the Buddha's routine austerities that were later expanded and mystified. The occurrence of discord between the disciples during the lifetime of the Buddha probably prompted the elders to envision a code of discipline during the first Buddhist Council. The Vinaya or Buddhist law soon became a complicated decalogue of rules that sometimes bordered on the bizarre. The popularity of the Buddha and the spread of his legend to distant areas soon brought in schisms that had to be clarified. Each time a dispute arose elders, who had by then became an order, had to mitigate them. The precedent was then used as base to set up new rules and a century later another council was to be held at Vaisali and

the Mahasanghikas broke into a separate faction paving the path to the deification of the Buddha.

The existence of the Vinaya in some form or the other irrespective of the schisms made the institutionalisation of Buddhism an easier task. The Abhidhamma or philosophical base of the Buddha's teachings put together from the Suttapitaka is apparently a late work. The teachings were never canonised during the life of the Buddha. They were put into order basing on the memory of the monks, which was then versified and was to be passed on orally as scripture. The original form is not known to history. The later form or the one that is available today has a lot of mythical elements added to it. These myths had probably evolved to fill the lapses in the original Suttapitaka. The initial purpose of the Abhidhamma probably was to formulate a definitive commentary in view of the missing links in the Suttapitaka, which at a later stage were stretched out into the justification of Theravada thought. Interestingly, the discrepancies in the early monastic code did not determine the need for a rational explanation at any historical stage. Much of the theorisations in the wake of Mahayana have all been based on convoluted understandings of the Buddha's essence.

The third Buddhist Council convened at Pataliputra during the reign of Asoka cannot be called a council. It was an assembly of Theravada monks of Pataliputra who decided to institutionalise Buddhism under the active patronage of Asoka. The inscriptions of Asoka are strangely silent about the assembly held according to tradition in the 18th regnal year of Asoka sometime during 257 BCE. The Pali cannon gives the following account: "When 236 years had elapsed after the Parinirvana of the great teacher 60,000 monks dwelt in Asokarama. Sectarians of different descriptions, all of them wearing the ochre robes ruined the doctrine of the Jina. It was then that Tissa Moggaliputta convoked a council attended by1000 monks. Having destroyed the false doctrines and subdued many shameless people he restored the true faith and propounded the Abhidhamma text, Kathavatthu. It was from him that the future apostle of Sri Lanka, Mahinda, learnt the five Nikayas, the seven books of Abhidhamma and the whole Vinaya."

This account has a pronounced sectarian tendency and is evidently inspired by the institutionalised form. By the time of the third Council, Buddhism had travelled into almost all corners of the sub-continent. The Mahasanghikas who broke away in the second Buddhist Council had initially established themselves at Vaisali and subsequently in the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. They were propagating the Buddha as supramundane that prompted a whole new approach to the teachings. The new zones of settlement in the coastal districts of Andhra provided the base for a cultural legacy that was to have a lasting and decisive effect on the future of Buddhism itself.

**the appeal**

The appeal and popularity of Buddhism were actually rooted in a ritual culture that is often ignored at the behest of its epistemological ideals, which undoubtedly are the richest perspectives on human nature ever conceptualised. Religion as an organised institution and its popularity is often mismatched with its central idea while assessing its popular appeal or sometimes a lack of it. The elite of any economically stratified culture at any given point in history would not only be preceptors of religious ideas but also act as perpetuators of such legacy. In the case of Buddhism the simplicity and directness mixed with certain pragmatism of approach enhanced its appeal to an extent where specific barriers emanating from culture were surpassed in a relatively easier manner. This widespread appeal therefore can be neither base to a unified approach of looking at Buddhism as a monolithic religion nor can we exclude the ritual facts that made it accessible to populations who seem to have been simultaneously at various phases of historical evolution. The textual evidences gleaned from the various phases of Buddhist epistemology present a picture, again in a highly idealised sense, the process of debate on specific issues within a specified time and space. From data currently available in terms of inscriptions, texts and material findings there is overwhelming evidence to point out that the monastery in terms of the dwelling of monks and their given pursuit of Buddhist ideals was largely different from the laity that was patronising it, solely on the merit of its rituals and for the economic advantages that monastic establishments had to offer.

Here we need to point out clearly that rituals themselves are in a constant state of flux. The appeals of new rituals have always dictated adaptations where each successive generation would find reason within a local or regional context. The adaptive dynamics of Buddhism in sustaining the ritual interests of a population through successive generations and in most cases through historical mutations are fascinating and by far the most successful example of religious organisation anywhere in the world.

**the edifice**

The association of Buddhism with urbanity and trade in the last two centuries before the Christian era appears more as a situational reality then a patent truth. The popularity of its appeal seems to lay in its institutionalisation as religion that contained scripture, myth and ritual rather then its supposed philosophical allure that cannot for obvious reasons be true. Further, insinuation of the urban sphere and trade as in some strange way being outside the

periphery of ritual-religion is at best an uninformed opinion. Trade and the growth of urban areas definitely helped Buddhism to spread across vast regions, which in the Satavahana period included the hinterlands. The institutionalisation of Buddhism made it a very exclusive religion. A Buddhist establishment required several compulsions to be fulfilled. An ideal location was to be chosen that was to be approachable to the laity while being equally reclusive to the monks. Elaborate arrangements were then made to build a monastery that could have required cutting rocks into cells at a great height or free standing structures in plains. Buddhism in many ways can be termed the first Indian religion that employed architecture as part of its religious vision. It was to be the foundation on which the later cults like the Saivas, Bhagavatas and Sakteyas were to build their edifices. One needs not to be surprised if the early Buddhists were inspired by the Megalithic cultures in central India and the Deccan. There are actually quite a few architectural similarities between the Megalithic burials, the Stupas and Chaityas.

The culture of commemorating the deceased in a highly structured manner is definitely inspired by the Megalithic, in whose domain Buddhism found its faithful. The Stupa is in many ways a sophisticated version of the cairn circles and the dolmens. The structural idea behind the Megalithic burial somehow suits the Buddhist purpose of venerating the Buddha although adoration of an individual of supposedly divine affinity may or may not have been part of the Megalithic culture prior to the arrival of the Stupa.

The word Stupa, which is also called Dagoba, or Tope, is an architectural term meaning 'raised up by accumulation'. The word Chaitya also in some restricted sense means the same. Etymologically the term Chaitya comes from the root word 'chi' to collect or to pile up and comes to denote the funeral pile called 'chita' in Sanskrit, which can also mean the memorial stone or tomb built over the ashes of a dead person signifying the practice of ancestral worship. In cultures where the relic or the bodily remains of the dead are revered the word Chaitya attains a greater significance. This custom was also prevalent among the early Jainas.

*...vakataka, period four, lower krishna valley.*

54 *a ruined chaitya atop the hill; guntupalle, lower godavari valley.*

There is a legend about the Buddha asking his nephew and disciple Ananda to erect a Stupa after his cremation at the conjuncture of four roads. Like stated earlier, it comes from the Mahaparinibbanasutta that was versified sometime during the third quarter of the 2nd century BCE and therefore cannot be taken as a historical fact. Moreover we have no archaeological record of such constructions of the Buddha's date. It is most likely that the Mahaparinibbanasutta gives such an account in tune with the supramundane quality of the Buddha. However, it was definitely the Buddhists who popularised the Stupa to enshrine the remains of the Buddha.

There are three variations of the Stupa. The Sariara Dhatu Stupa contains corporeal relics of either the Buddha himself or his chief disciples who had attained Arhathood. Then there are the Pariboghika and the Uddesika Stupas that denote the enshrining of the articles used by the Buddha and the places that the Buddha visited during his lifetime respectively. In the cases of the last variation Stupas were built in places that are associated with the legends that grew around him after the institutionalisation. If the Stupa was built over the sacred relic of the Buddha, usually a tooth or a bone, it was encased in an exquisitely carved casket along with jewels and precious metals on which in certain cases inscriptions were found as at Bhattiprolu in the Guntur district. A huge hall was built over the Stupa used for the ritual purpose of circumambulation and to offer other obeisance that were consider meritorious acts. Gradually symbols like the wheel, elephant, lotus, footprints and parasols were erected to represent the Buddha. The raise of Mahayana saw the erection of icons styled as the Buddha. From the architectural point of view there are however no distinctions between the variations of the Stupa.

The sectarian division of Buddhism makes the Mahayana Stupas more embellished then their Theravada counterparts, which all along were relatively simple. From the Stupas extant now the earliest ones have a plain structure, a hemispherical dome in the shape of an egg or the posterior of an elephant, on its summit sits a square shaped box called the Harmika further crowned by a wheel-like parasol called the Chattra symbolising universal appeal. The circumference of the dome is paved with a circumambulatory path or Pradakshina Patha that is further enclosed within a balustrade or wall in certain cases. The tendency in evolution was towards elongation and height and a solid dome is formed called the Medhi or the drum that rises to a certain distance on which a square plinth, sometimes with a projection or two on either face.

The Chattra increases in a tapering row of flat discs, the topmost one usually ending in a point side by side with these additional elements constitute a corresponding elevation of each component part. The whole composition therefore gives the Stupa an elongated appearance. In the early Stupas datable to the 3rd and 2nd Centuries before the Christian era the hemispherical dome was the principle structure where the base and finials were merely accessories. The stress of height and elongation makes the Stupa of the Mahayana phase a forerunner to the spires that came to denote the typical south Indian temple in the medieval era. The elongations were exquisitely embellished with motifs and sculptural patterns.

Apart from the Stupas few other monuments have also survived in perfect shape since they were carved in rock. The rock-cut caves of the Deccan are some of the finest accomplishments of architecture in that genre. The custom of fashioning shelters and shrines out of the rock either by enlarging a natural cavern or by entirely new constructions seems to have been quite in vogue. The convenient textures of the rocks in the Deccan trap were inspired by the idea of enshrining the Buddha in a place that is literally immutable. In rock hewn architecture no new structural forms were evolved in specific. All these seem to be rock-cut variations of wooden building designs that were popular during those times when the caves were carved, mostly during the Satavahana period. Though the Chaitya is a typical example of early architecture in the western Deccan its genesis and anterior process of evolution could be traced to carvings in the Gangetic plain. The earliest excavations in rock that may have some connection with the rock-cut Chaitya of the later times are at Barbara, near Gaya.

The Sudama cave carved in the 12th regnal year of Asoka for the use of Ajivaka monks along with the Lomasa Rishi, although not dated but definitely started during the same period, have probably some connection architecturally. The former consists of two apartments, a rectangular one at the outer end and separated from it by a solid wall, a circular one at the back. There is a narrow connecting passage between the two. A barrel-shaped vault and the circular cover, the outer chamber by a hemispherical dome. The length of the cave runs parallel to the face of the rock and hence the entrance doorway is near one end of the longer side. Deeply set into the face of the rock, the doorway has sloping jambs. The Lomasa Rishi cave, in plan and arrangement is closely identical with the Sudama cave, but the inner chamber, instead of being circular is oval. The façade has been finished with great care and is an important influence on the rock-cut Chaityas of the succeeding ages.

The entire architecture is reminiscent of wooden work and construction. There seems to be a lot of similarities in style of the Sudama and Lomasa Rishi caves. The earliest resonances of these caves come across at Karle and Kondavite in Western Maharashtra. Votive Stupa and a

narrow circumambulatory path at Karle and Kondavite occupy the empty space that was left at the Barbara caves. Probably the earliest forms of the Chaitya shrine consisted of a circular cellar alone containing the votive Chaitya. The proof for the above suggestion comes from Bairat in the Jaipur area of Rajasthan. Remains of brick and wood from atop a hill were found sometime in the 1930's. The study of material culture in and around the ruins gives a date contemporary to Asoka. The structure is a square area with a votive Chaitya and a circumambulatory path. Twenty-six wooden pillars supported the entire hall. There is also an outer ambulatory covered by a brick screen with an entrance passage in the east. The similarities of this design can be found at Junnar in Maharasthra and Guntupalle in Andhra Pradesh without of course the supporting pillars. Rock-cut Chaityas carved in a distinct volcanic rock at Bojjanakonda at Anakapalle and the brick structures at Ramathirtham near Vijayanagaram have also some affinity to the structure found at Bairat.

**dwellings**

The Sangharama or Vihara is another important aspect of Buddhism. Elaborate dwelling space for the monks is a late phenomenon. The earliest Viharas were probably made of wood and the flooring was plastered with mud. The brick and mortar replicas seem to have succeeded the wooden Viharas as the orders of monks were increasing. Although these were also slightly around the time of Asoka none of them have survived except for the foundation through which we can have a considerable idea. The Sangharama ideally had a long row of cells meant for meditating and residence in a square or rectangular formation making a courtyard that was paved and also used as an assembly hall. The later Viharas datable around the turn of the 2nd Century BCE and later had specific space for at least two assembly halls.

The Stupa and Chaitya halls were apart from the dwellings and were frequented by the laity in the neighbourhood, which again is of a late origin. The earliest of monk-dwellings found in Taxila in Pakistan and some brick abodes found in Afghanistan datable to around 300BCE give us testimony for the fact that laity initially had no contact with monks with the Vihara. Begging was probably still the means of survival for these monks. The establishment of Stupas at the Vihara coincides with the growth of ritualism and much later the growth of the monk to a ritual status as somebody to be revered. The best examples can however be the rock-cut Viharas in the western Deccan and the elaborate brick structure of the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. They all invariably belong to the Satavahana era and later when patronage had reached its zenith along with the popularity of the Buddhists. Begging had now become a very symbolic act and the Viharas had large stores of rice and other essentials.

58 *three storied monastic complex carved from a single rock. ellora western deccan.*

*an overview of a monastic establishment; salihundam. north coastal andhra.*

The occupation of the Vihara was not restricted to the Vassavasa. Throughout the year monks kept coming and going and the monastery had become an institution within the religion itself. The Mahayana phase ushered the separation of monks and the monastery from the laity in many ways. The laity had adapted the ritual role totally while the stress on the monastery seems to be on speculation and growth of Buddhist logic. Although the two are not exclusive from each other the laity seem to be evolving ritualism nearly oblivious to the existence of Buddhist epistemology that had reach its hallmark. The Sangharamas were packed with monks discussing the finest points of logic and philosophy. The massive production of literature induced the Sangharamas to carve enormous space for libraries almost throughout the sub-continent between the 3rd and 9th centuries of the Christian era one of the most intellectually productive period in the entire history of India and almost entirely due to the Buddhists.

There are also a number of historical problems in studying the growth and situation of Sangharama. The Buddhist establishments saw the light of the day during the colonial period when they were brought back into the sequence of history. The monasteries were invariable in remote areas not easily accessible by the standards of the present. This led most colonial historians to suppose that the Buddhist monks were living in isolation and were dependent on begging while most of them spent the entire year except during the rains wandering. These ideas were deduced with the aid of Buddhist literature that gives us a very ideal picture of a monk's life. This idea need not actually be true. Secondly, the excavation procedure followed by the colonial archaeologists is still being used, one which essentially looks at the Sangharama as exclusive from its immediate surroundings.

In fact much of our present understanding of the Viharas and Sangharamas comes primarily with the focus on the monastery and not by looking beyond it so as to build a logical sequence of interaction between the local population and the Buddhist establishment. A research scholar in early monastic Buddhism, Lars Fogelin of the University of Michigan in the United States adopted systematic archaeological survey to unravel the relationship of the laity with the monks and examining it in the specific contexts of sustenance economy, worship and influence. Fogelin made in depth studies on one particular early monastic site called Thotlakonda at Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh, dated to the first quarter of the 2nd century BCE, and came up with a wealth of information from the point of view of the laity living in the foot of the hill during the early historic period. Unfortunately, such a study has not been done on any other site in Andhra Pradesh or Maharashtra.

# memes of the master

avyaja karuna mudra or the posture of boundless compassion; ellora 5th century CE, western deccan

The success of the human species is attributed to specific replications through selection in form of the genes. But if one were to measure the same success in cultural terms a new word had to be coined. The Scottish biologist Richard Dawkins came up with the word Meme or the cultural equivalent of the Gene. Meme is the word again that can be attributed to the success of the Buddha. There are several Buddhisms based though on the same basic tenants of the Master. Its mutations are numerous. Its selections are varied over entire breadths of diversity. Its health always sustained through these millennia...and its memes phenomenal.

*farm labour during a winter morning mist. the mundane and mindfulness were inseparable; singarayakonda, south coastal andhra.*

The earliest available teaching of the Buddha to be found in Pali literature belongs to the school of the Theravadas, who may be called the orthodox school of Buddhism for the purpose of convenient identification. This school admits the human nature of Buddha and he is often represented as having human fallibilities though is recognised as possessing superhuman qualities. He is described in some passages as Devatideva, still, as in the Catuma Sutta; he is impatient with some of his disciples with whom he remonstrates for making a noise like undisciplined folk, such as fishermen in a fish market. He is also subject to human weaknesses when say he is eighty years old that he has a pain in his back. The teachings of Buddha according to this school are very simple. He preaches to abstain from all kinds of evil, to accumulate all that is good and to purify the mind. These can be accomplished by practice of what are called Sila, Samadhi.

and Prajna. Sila or good conduct is the very basis of all progress in human life. The ordinary householder must abstain from murder, theft, false hood, improper sexual behaviours and intoxicants. If one chooses to become a monk that entails a life of celibacy, observing certain disciplinary codes.

The remaining observances include not using garlands and other personal effects. The lists of dos and don'ts are innumerable. The avoidance of soft seats and beds, not using gold or silver ornaments, abstention from gambling, contests, indulgences in predictions of omens, taking astrological advices for simple things are some of things that the early monastic code advices restraint. Sometimes good conduct is also described as refraining from the evil ways of life ideas that contributed to acquiring Karma like false hold, slander, harsh words and vain garrulous talk.

A single-minded devotion to the working of the mind or in other words meditation is to be attained. The purpose of meditation is to keep the mind perfectly balanced so that it may be possible to gain proper insight into the real nature of things, which is done by cultivating insight or Prajna. The cultivation of Prajna helps one to understand at one and the same time the four noble truths and the law of Dependent Origination, which tries to explain the phenomenon of life by smoothing the interrelation of life with the one that gives the following as the four ultimate categories: Consciousness or Citta, Mental properties or Catitasika, Material qualities or Rupa, and Nirvana. Consciousness is further classified into hundred and twenty-one types according to other classifications, mental properties into fifty-two and material qualities, into twenty-eight. Nirvana is happy state that is free from passion, a state beyond description that can only be

*a carved motif resembling mystical infinity and order: nagarjunakonda. 3rd century CE. lower krishna valley.*

experienced. When one understands the true nature of things, worldly life is renounced since there is nothing substantial in it. Avoidance of both indulgence in the pleasures of senses and self-mortification is recommended. A Middle path or Madhyamapratipatti was conceived that moulds life according to the noble eight-fold path which consists of right view, right resolve, right words, right actions, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. One realizes that all worldly suffering in due to craving or hankering called Trasna and it is possible to bring suffering to an end by following the noble Eightfold Path. When one achieves the perfect state of dispassionateness or Nirvana, he becomes a worthy man or Arhat. The life of an Arhat is the ideal of the followers of this school, a life where all future birth is extinguished, while the only life is fully realized and achieved, where all that had to be done has been done and there is no more return to worldly life.

**the early sangha**

The first schism in the Buddhist Sangha established after the First Council, took place at the time of the Second Council a hundred years after the Parinirvana of the Buddha at Vaisali. The Sangha was split in two, one section being called Mahasanghikas, and other was the Theras or Sthaviras in Sanskrit. Both Mahayana and Theravada textual traditions place the first schism a century after the Buddha's death and both of them maintain that the Theravada school remained undivided while the Mahasanghikas gave rise to eight different sects. Of the eight mentioned in both Mahayana and Theravada texts three were located in the lower Krishna valley. The eight schools were Ekavyavaharika, Lokottaravada, Kaukutika, Bahusurtiya, Prajnapttivada, Purvasaila, Aparasaila and Uttarasaila. Divisions started in the Theravada camp a century later sometime in 280 BCE. The first gave rise to two schools Sarvastivada and Mulasthavirvada that is also called Haimavata. From the Sarvastivada rose Vatisiputriya that gave rise to four schools Dhammottariya, Badrayaniya, Samattiya and Chennagarika. Later on, two other schools also lose from Sarvastivada. They were Kasyapiya and Mahisasika. The Mahisasikas had a strong presence in ancient Andhra. On a pillar inscription belonging to the fourth year of Ehavula Chamtamula the sect is mentioned. The Kasypiyas had a presence at Karla in the Western Deccan.

The last school to originate from the Sarvastivadas came into existence in the first century of the pre-Christian era is popularly known as Sautantrika. The Mahasanghikas ever since their inception at Vaisali were mostly confined to the east from where they quickly spread to coastal Andhra and then to the rest of the cultural sequences there. The followers of the school did not have a presence in the Northwest or anywhere else within the Gangetic plain. The first recorded inscription of Mahasanghikas in the Western Deccan comes from Karla belonging to the twenty-fourth regnal year of Vahittiputta Siri Pulamayi. The inscription records a grant of a nine celled hall to the Mahasanghikas. The gift was important and shows that the sect was held in high esteem within that region. The Mahasanghikas developed a literature of their own. In fact it claimed to have preserved the most authentic tradition of early Buddhism in so far as it traced its lineage from Mahakasyapa, responsible for convening the first Buddhist council in which, according to tradition, the canon was conceived for the first time. The Tibetan accounts say that the literature of the School as written in the Prakrit language but no original text of the school having come down to us we do not know what sort of Prakrit it was. The Vinaya of this School has however, survived in its entirety in a Chinese translation made by Fa-Hien and Buddhapala dated around 424 of the Christian era. Fa-Hien discovered a manuscript of this text on his Indian travels at a Mahayana monastery in Magadha.

## mahayana

Mahayana Buddhism is usually called the theistic form of Buddhism. A careful examination of facts would reveal otherwise. Mahayana is an interpretative school that emerged under the influence of a rationale based on the superhuman qualities of the Buddha. Rituals are, as stated earlier elsewhere in the book; in our view are an explicit cultural form that have a cumulative evolution through several phases of history. Ritualism may not necessarily be confirmed to or defined as an indelible mark of a specific religion unless such a religion has ritualism independent of an epistemology as in the case of the Vedic religion. Buddhism has some of the finest proposals on human nature ever to be conceived in the history of humanity. Mahayana being its interpretative organ extended such an epistemology further. We also need to understand the division between ritualism as practiced by the laity and in some cases the monks and epistemology that is a domain entirely dominated and defined by individual perceptions and speculations.

*of the buddha,bojjanakonda,4th century CE, north coastal andhra*

*meditative buddha. the infinity of silence; ajanta. 3rd century CE. western deccan.*

The lack of a clear cut division between the various forms of ritualism has led many to consider Mahayana as in some form degrading the original word of the Buddha. Some of the most important features of Mahayana are the recognition of the Buddha's historical persona as reflected in the early monastic literature as the last in the series of former lives thereby establishing him to be supernatural and being capable of supernatural feats. The Buddha's thousands of reincarnations are viewed as manifestations of a primordial supernatural figure that Mahayana terms as Adibuddha. The conception of Adibuddha in the interpretative part is the allusion of the perfection of human mind and not as a god-creator of theistic religions.

The Adibuddha is therefore to be understood as the personification of the immense capability that the human mind has in achieving perfection. Mahayana liturgical texts equivocally stress on the achievability of perfection by any human being through accumulation of merit, wisdom and compassion that are basic pillars.

These three basic components are conceptualised in form of the Trikayas or the Three-fold planes of the Buddha. These are in sharp contrast to the ideals espoused by the early monastic schools that stressed on the achievement of Arhathood or personal liberation. Despite the non-theistic nature of Mahayana and Buddhism in general, it is not an atheistic religion as understood in the modern sense.

In fact it would be incongruous to equate conceptions of Semitic religions while dealing with Buddhism. Atheism puts the onus on a clear denial of anything that cannot be explained universally by appealing to strictures that can be readily reckoned and are therefore rational. Mahayana is in many ways a basic denial of strictures of any kind that seek to explain the experience of perfection or worse still, rationalise it.

**orgin**

On the surface it may appear that there is very little difference between the conceptions of Mahasanghikas and Mahayana, since both these schools essentially formulated the Buddha as supramundane entity. Opinion is strongly divergent on that topic. Some scholars opine that the Mahasanghikas would have had differences with Theravadins only on the principle of how the Buddha had to be perceived but remained similar otherwise. Despite the outward similarity they term Mahayana to be distinct from the Mahasanghikas and attribute the conceptualisation of Mahayana to extensions of the Sarvastivada School that migrated to the Northwest after their line of logic was vanquished at the Pataliputra clique organised under Asoka.

The outwards similarity being what it was the conception of Buddha as supramundane is to be understood in a clear perspective. Firstly, if we were to view Mahayana as distinct

*marble-like limestone fragment of a figure adorning a stupa; dhanyakataka. period two. lower krishna valley.*

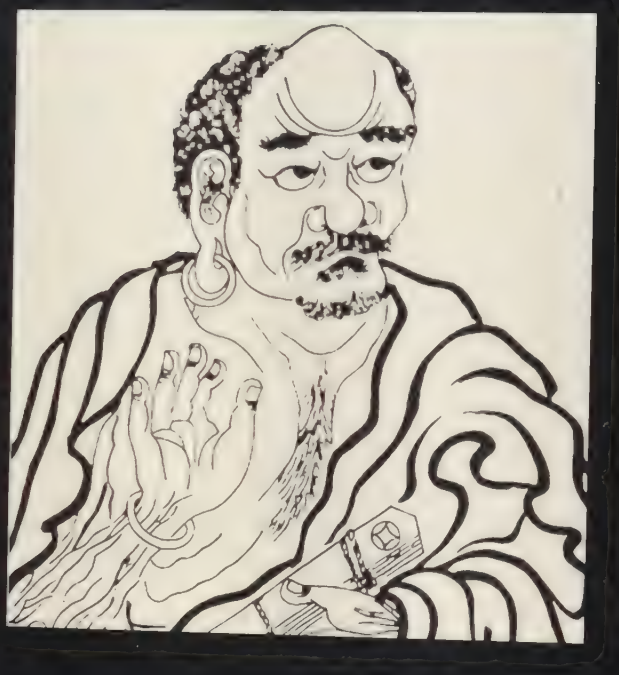
from the Mahasanghikas then it should be known that the Mahasanghika version of the reasons for the schism at Vaisali is not extant. With the exception of the Vinaya, as stated earlier, being extant in Chinese translation nothing of the School's literature was ever found. The Theravada version of the points of schism only further prove that the conception of the Buddha as supramundane had in it a deeper resonance which, they either never understood or found unthinkable to even merit mention. It seems possible that the differences were not just about the right perspective on the Buddha purely as a historical person but as an icon that included the chief components of the Sangha and the Dhamma. It implies that if a Mahavinaya could exist there could have also been a 'Mahabhidhamma' by extension of circumstantial logic. Since it is a historical fact that the Mahasanghikas were the first to conceive of the Buddha as supramundane the so-called 'Mahabhidhamma' could have not only contained mere justification for their thesis for considering the Buddha as supramundane but could have also contained a strong epistemological base which either inspired early Mahayana liturgical texts. It therefore is possible that the Mahayana Sutras themselves were fragments of the original 'Mahabhidhamma'. There are further reasons to strengthen such a hypothesis.

In the biographies of Nagarjuna as preserved in the Tibetan and Chinese traditions it is stated in both that he was an ordained monk with a good grounding in the Abhidhamma.

The date of Nagarjuna has been a controversy for a long time. Much of the controversy is about which Nagarjuna was the preceptor of the Madhyamika School given at least four other Nagarjunas who were all mentioned in Mahayana texts with all of them originating in Andhra. A lot of that haze has now settled to place Nagarjuna, the preceptor of the Madhyamika School sometime in the last quarter of the per-Christian era and the 1st century of the Christian era. Being a resident of the lower Krishna Valley the historical Nagarjuna could have been well versed in the Abhidhamma, which is the Abhidhamma of the Mahasanghikas. Current scholarship places the Pali Abhidhamma in the later part of the 2nd and early parts of the 3rd century of the Christian era. It is highly improbable that Nagarjuna studied the Pali Abhidhamma as an ordained monk. These hypothetical Abhidhamma text or texts could have been the earliest of the Abhidhamma texts ever to be devised. If there was an Abhidhamma of the Mahasanghikas then it must have been formulated in the lower Krishna Valley and Mahayana was in all probability an organised extension of the Mahasanghika and specifically their Abhidhamma.

Prof. B.S.L. Hanumantha Rao in his seminal work 'Religion in Andhra' has propounded a series of arguments based on historical facts to suppose that Mahayana originated in Andhra. The Chatiyakas were the first to claim the Buddha as superhuman as early as the 3rd century BCE.

*ellora. 5th century CE. western deccan*



*a modern chinese wood-block representation of nagarjuna, the fourteenth patriarch.*

*ripened flax. impermance; narayankhet. western deccan.*

The Bhattiprolu inscriptions hold Buddha as Lokottara. In almost all the inscriptions found in Andhra dating back from the Bhattiprolu relic caskets to the medieval period everywhere the Buddha is referred to as having supramundane qualities. According to the Mahayana one has to pass through ten stages or Dasabhumika before becoming a Bodhisattva. Then there is the eighth stage of confidences or Vaisaradyas that has inspired the Jataka tales, which were very popular amongst the Andhras as can be seen from the sculpture at Dhanyakataka and Nagarjunakonda. There are the realisations that he has attained perfect enlightenment and understands all principles and phenomenon.

It is followed by the knowledge that all the Asavaras or intoxicants have been destroyed and realisation of the obstacles leading to an enlightened life. There are ten such stages perfected, that are called Satva doctrines, are all stated in detail in the Dasabhumika Sutra that again is suspected to be of Mahasanghika origin. Special or extraordinary Dharma called Avenikadhana that distinguishes Buddha from the other mortals is not stated in the Pali Chronicles but only in the Vaipulya Sutras.

Hanumantha Rao goes on to specifically relate all the fundamental conceptions of Mahayana in order to prove his point. On the strength of overwhelming evidence Mahayana seems to be a very natural development that included a ritual phase along side an interpretative epistemology championed by individual philosophers who were Andhras. The intellectual atmosphere generated by the Mahayana system produced the Prajnaparamita literature. Nagarjuna was the earliest and one of the greatest exponents of the Paramita basing on which he conceived the theory of Sunyata. Gradually, within the fold of Mahayana there came another school called Yogacara that was founded by Asanga and Vasubandhu in the 4th century of the Christian era. Although both of them were residents of northwest their expositions came mostly from Andhra through the focus of Dinnaga who was resident at the Guntupalle monastery in the West Godavari district. Dharmakirti lived and worked at Salihundam in the Srikakulam district. Apart from these philosophers Aryadeva, Bhavaviveka and Buddhapalita also hailed from Andhra.

The philosophy of the Middle Way or Madhyamika philosophy has sometimes been called the central philosophy of the Mahayana tradition. It has even been called the central philosophy of Buddhism in general. The Madhyamika has also been called the Doctrine of Emptiness or in Sanskrit Sunyata and the doctrine of the non-self-existence, or insubstantiality of things or Nisvabhavavada. The founder of this philosophy was Nagarjuna, who lived at the end of the final century of the pre-Christian era or in the 1st century of the Christian era. He was born in Andhra, probably somewhere in the Guntur district and seems to have been of Brahmin decent. There are huge problems about the historical facts of his life. Much of it comes from biographies retained mainly in the Tibetan language, where he is given a life span of around 600 years or above and much of the facts are mythical. But much of the confusion comes from the fact there were at least four other Nagarjunas who were all eminent Buddhists and were from Andhra. The existences of several namesakes to Nagarjuna had led to attributing several works on Mahayana along with treatises on alchemy and medicine to him. The original Nagarjuna or Acharya Nagarjuna seems to have authored quite a number of works of which, none are available in the original except in Tibetan and Chinese translations.

He seems to have been ordained very early in life and perhaps spent a great deal of his early career pursuing the Abhidhamma, whose sectarian affiliation is not known. Most scholars see Nagarjuna as an interpreter than an innovator. He took certain inspirations and insights from the Vaipulya Sutras and the Abhidhamma, reinterpreting

and restating them in a particularly clear and forthright way. But it would be rather unfair to condense his role as philosopher just pertaining to one certain stream of Mahayana Buddhism. Nagarjuna definitely has his place in the history of ideas that shaped the world. His interpretations, if taken so, are nonetheless the most innovative. Nagarjuna is noted for his substantial literary works, which include the Foundation Stanzas of the Middle Way or Mulamadhyamakakarika and the Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness Sunyatasaptati, apart from works on logic that cannot for now be historical ascertained. Nagarjuna's efforts in promoting and propagating Mahayana won him widespread recognition in Tibet, China, and Japan. He figures prominently among the primary founders of the Tibetan, and Chan, and Zen Buddhist traditions.

The works of Nagarjuna as indeed the teaching of the Madhyamika cannot not be seen as a radical departure from the general direction and development of Buddhist thought as a whole. They had definite origins in the teachings of the Buddha and in the early monastic tradition, particularly the Abhidhamma. In the Theravada canon, there is a record of the Buddha's statements about the importance of Sunyata and also a record of the famous "Fourteen Inexpressibles," or unanswerable questions. In addition, we find a very clear precursor of Madhyamika in the perfection of wisdom literature, where the primary theme is emptiness. This is the very theme elaborated by Nagarjuna in works like his Mulamadhyamakakarika. In the Abhidhamma Pitaka, in the Book of Causal Relations or Pathana, too, we can see the anticipation of the Madhyamika philosophy in the emphasis on the examination of relations. All these are clear indications of the very early and authentic origins of Madhyamika.

Just as the contents of the Madhyamika are not anything radical, so the method of the Madhyamika is to be found in the very earliest period of the Buddhist tradition. The characteristic method of the Madhyamika is analysis of phenomena and relations. One might even say that its characteristic method is not only analysis but also critically dialectic. All this methodology from analysis to criticism and dialectic is, the substance of the Madhyamika indicated both in the Buddha's own approach and in the approach of the Abhidhamma tradition, where we find the various alternatives isolated and methods of answering questions elucidated. This should be sufficient to indicate that the origins and methods of the Madhyamika philosophy go far back in the history of Buddhist thought.

Nagarjuna's fundamental theorisations are directed towards the notion of independent being, or self-existence or Svabhava. Nagarjuna rejects it by examining relativity, or interdependent origination, in a critical, dialectic way, beginning with the idea of self-existence, and terminating with the idea of emptiness. These three steps from self-existence to non-self-existence, and finally to emptiness developed through three types of investigation. Firstly, the investigation of causality, then, the investigation of concepts, and finally through the investigation of knowledge. Through the investigation of these three classes of phenomena Nagarjuna guides us from the naïve, mundane belief in the idea of self-existence, in the independent reality of phenomena, to an intellectual understanding of emptiness.

Madhyamika arrives at the insubstantiality and relativity of all phenomena through an examination of interdependent origination. In this context it is shown that, insofar as all things exist dependent on a combination of causes and conditions, they have no independent self-existence and are therefore empty. The classical example is that of the sprout, which exists dependent on the earth, water, air, and sunlight. Inasmuch as the sprout depends on these factors for its existence, it has no self-existence and is therefore without self-existence. Being without self-existence, it is empty. This is the simplest and most direct Madhyamika investigation of causality, and it leads us straight to the notion of emptiness.

But for the Madhyamika, emptiness also means non-origination and non-production. The idea of non-origination and non-cessation occurs very frequently. Emptiness in this context means the non-origination or the non-arising in reality of all phenomena. Nagarjuna explains this particular consequence of emptiness through a method that is similar to the western dialectic method and not necessarily the same. There are four possibilities for the origination of phenomena, or the relationship between cause and effect: (a) that the cause and effect are identical, (b) that the cause and effect are different, (c) that the cause and effect are both identical and different, and (d) that phenomena arise without cause. These four basic alternatives are indicated in the first verse of the Mulamadhyamakakarika, which states "no entity is produced at any time, anywhere, or in any manner from self, from other, from both, or without cause." This is the fundamental Madhyamika critique of causality.

The basis of these four alternatives is analytically derived through a deductive process. The Madhyamika isolates these four in the following way: If phenomena do originate, they will originate either with a cause or without a cause. Here there are already two fundamental alternatives: phenomena originate either with or without a cause. The latter position is represented in the fourth alternative, according to which phenomena originates without a cause. If one were to accept that phenomena do originate with a

*...by the yakkhas: phanigiri, 3rd century CE, telengana*

unlearning the centre

To the early archaeologist, Buddhist sites somehow represented commonness, reducing them to retreats where complex ideas of redemption worked during the rains. Later the idea of redemption was a superstructure based on punch-marked money and trade-route networks. While rains, redemption and punched money remain true we look for the footsteps of the lay-seeker who walked her way up the hill to circumambulate the Stupa for the merit of family and neighbour, gifted an inscribed mud carafe, bartered raw cotton for a fake Roman gold coin, listened to a monk's sermon and went back to her smile and children.

*a bullock cart moves on the ancient trade route; karimnagar-luxsettipeta. telengana.*

Ever since the discovery of Buddhist sites and related antiquities in the early quarter of the 19th century there has been a tendency to find a unifying motif and ideal to explicate Buddhist sites sometimes at the risk of sanitising them against any external influence while dealing with their long histories. The interpretation of these sites as cultural phenomena has been evolving since colonial times as mentioned earlier. Unfortunately, nothing much has changed since the inception of such research. With a few exceptions like Lars Fogelin and Gregory Schopen before him Buddhist sites have always been viewed unilaterally based on textual conceptions. It would be preposterous to suggest that we have any better interpretation then those that are current. However we aim to examine the existing data with the help of some contemporary elucidations rather than ideating grand theories that tend to unify myriad Buddhist sites over varying ranges of terrain and history. Our view is that each of these sites through evolution, spread and demise were being influenced and were influencing their respective ethnospheres.

To the uninitiated, the uniqueness of a Buddhist site may be owing to the lack of tangible inferences from the immediate cultural ambience where the existing religious manifestations make them distant remains that need to be slotted and explained later. It could also be due to the common perception of placing Buddhism and its articulations outside a cultural succession that is increasingly being taken for granted. This is however not to be confused with the view that equates Buddhism with Pan-Indian religious sects to the point of considering them analogous. We strongly maintain that Buddhism in all its variations is not similar to any of the existing religions. Buddhism being the earliest of the organised and multi-layered religions in the sub-continent with distinct rituals, myths and philosophies it has provided later religions basis to many of their premises that are almost never acknowledged.

A set of parameters in order to view the range of Buddhist sites in early Andhra would probably be needed. They certainly are not new ideas while some of them actually have been used in other contexts. These parameters may not be sufficient to explain all the complexities of a Buddhist site but they definitely, we believe, contribute to a better understanding of the existing interpretations to the purpose, growth and desertion of sites.

1. The ecological perception in choosing a site that seems to have controlled the growth of the entire region as a prospective 'Sequence'. Each region has to be further divided into sub-regions with distinct eco-zones, resultant climate and sustenance patterns.

2. The succession of culture and its influence on the earliest layers of the migrant Buddhist conception has to be studied and categorised in accordance with a historical timeframe before arriving upon any definitive idea about the purpose, structure and means adopted to sustain a Buddhist establishment.

3. The situation of a Buddhist establishment in a given sociological context and its apparent influence on local communities is to be assessed before formulating an inter-relationship model that might also serve as a base to analyse a cluster of subsidiary Buddhist sites sharing the same eco-zone. We have termed these as 'mirror sites'.

4. The augmentation and regression of trade, in local and regional contexts, as an independent mode of production. Since trade seems to have influenced and invigorated the growth of early monastic establishments in all the four cultural sequences of Ancient Andhra.

5. The role of ritual as an inclusive process of culture from the perception of the laity that determined popular appeal amongst laity and patronage

6. The role of large-scale agriculture in the backdrop of the demise of trade while determining the growth and patronage of Mahayana.

Terrain seems to have been the most vital aspect for the survival of any Buddhist site, the situation of a monastery in a specific terrain gives us some indication of its spread from the point of its origin, which again has its own local sphere. They have been distinct routes that have connected ancient Andhra to the Gangetic plains. The movement of people seems to have been sea-borne close to the coast for a number of centuries. The major land routes running overland remained towards the eastern seaboard beginning with the month of the Ganga and jutting down towards Sri Lanka. Ships travelled from the ports of the Ganga delta and reached the inlands through river systems of the Mahanadi, Godavari and Krishna from where they would travel inland through valleys. The coastal route towards the East could have been the easiest and most forwarded since the Eastern Ghats are less continuous and steep than the Western Ghats.

Apart from this route the other inland routes running north to south seems to be through the river valleys of Narmada or Tapti to reach Vidarbha, north Karnataka and the deep south. While, a slightly eastern variation of the southern route would touch upon the thick forests of Dandakaranya through the river valleys of western Mahanadi and the Waingangâ running into the Godavari valley and further down into the lower Krishna valley. The extreme western coastline is a narrow strip with the Arabian Sea on one end and the steep elevations of the Western Ghats on the other. Despite the uncongenial geographic location, some of the most successful seaports were on this strip. The inland route cutting through the deep forests of central India and its western variation provided the initial route to the south. There are a series of Buddhist sites within both the variations of this inland route.

The earliest site in this sequence is at Panguraria where the earliest inscriptions of Asoka are to be seen inside a rock shelter. Although the monastery seems to have existed prior to the period of Asoka there are indications to prove excluding the Asokan inscription that this site achieved an exalted position during the Mauryan regime. The historian Romila Thapar makes interesting observations on the relationship that might have existed between the local hunter-gatherer communities and the Buddhist monks, which she calls "sometimes hostile and sometimes harmonious". She says "hunter-gatherers were not new to the experience of Buddhist monks since such societies were scattered all over central India. Possibly these sites were also places of worship for the earlier settlers where they would gather.

This would provide the genesis of a congregation and reinforce the idea of rock caves and paintings. The rock paintings remained undamaged implying that earlier belief system was not seriously disturbed." The earliest seaports on the western seaboard seem to be at Sopara together with Girnar in Sourashtra. Girnar is in the vicinity of a Mauryan dam and was doubtlessly a fertile area in the early historic period. Both these posts were centres of early Buddhism. They seem to have initially traded with the Middle East and later extended towards the Red Sea from where Roman trade grew in the Satavahana times. With the start of the Christian era the entire coastal stretch on the western seaboard had a number of Buddhist sites.

river godavari, the southern border of the north coast, on an overcast morning; ravulapalem, lower godav

**the north coast sequence**

The north coastal districts of Srikakulam, Vijayanagaram, Vishakhapatnam and the dry zones of the east Godavari district comprise the Kalinga sites. The earliest in this sequence seem to be the establishments at Dantavarapukota and Kalingapatnam followed by Salihundam and its mirror sites, all of which seem to have thrived on the trade centre at Dantavarapukota and the seaport of Kalingapatnam. These areas might have directly been affected by the Kalinga campaign of Asoka and would have also benefited by the welfare and administrative measures taken in the post-war scenario when the spread of Buddhism could have been a major focus. There is a sudden spurt of activity with a number of monasteries being established through out the three northern districts irrespective of any urban base or patronage. It is possibly the only place within the Mauryan empire that has such a proliferation of Buddhist establishments. These establishments were probably sponsored directly by the state given the fact that they stand in places that are remote even by today's standards. The state-sponsorship could have been short-lived with the end of Asoka and eventually the Mauryans half a century later. The established sites probably had to create its own patrons amongst the local population with whom they must have had a long cultural interaction resulting in adapting and accommodating several practices that were local.

The details and its full impact need to be meticulously examined on a site-wise basis and only through full-scale excavations. The archaeological exploration by Lars Fogelin at Thotlakonda have only established the existence

of an interaction between the monastery and the habitations but it takes nothing less then thorough excavation of all the sites in the north coastal sequence to determine the distinctness of the Buddhism that seemed to have existed there and sometimes in marked contrast to the kind practiced in the lower Krishna Valley or the southern sequence.

The north coastal route was in all possibilities the earliest network linking Pataliputra with the south. It is in this area that the largest segments of Buddhist sites lie in Andhra Pradesh. The terrain in the northeast costal sequence of sites has always been semi-arid. The major advantage would have been the existence of urban trade centres in southern Orissa running southwards to the north coastal belt in Andhra. Full-scale agriculture had developed only in river valleys along the Mahanadi, Baitarani, Vamsadhara and the Godavari rivers towards the South at a much later period in history. The site most southern in this sequence is at Korukonda a small village 28 kilometres away from the town of Rajahmundry. Recently, a brick structure atop a hill was excavated that can be dated to the 1st century BCE. Two other sites developed in the vicinity at Vangalapudi, Rampa Errampalem belong to the early Mahayana phase when the Korukonda site was developed with rock cut caves. The site at Vangalapudi was exhumed in late 1950s when remnants of marble slabs and other votive structures were found. The absence of a full-fledged Stupa with monastic cells could be attributed to the probable vandalism in the late medieval period when local cults sought refuge on the hill that is popularly known as Ramavarapuaava and Ramadurgamkonda.

*a view of the gopalapatnam site during excavation.*

*a terracotta figurine of a mother goddess; gopalapatnam. 2nd century CE. north coastal andhra*

The Mahayana phase in the north coastal sequence is represented only at the sites of Rampa Errampalem, Korukonda, Vangalapudi, Kodavali, Bojjanakonda, Ramathirtham and Salihundam. Recently a Buddhist site of the Mahayana phase was discovered at Pasarlapudi in the Mamidikuduru Mandal of East Godavari district that has been identified with the Gunapasapura abode of monks from Sri Lanka, although nothing is as yet established. Two other sites have off late been exhumed, one at Chollangi where a series of votive structures were laid bare and the other within a power generation plant at Jegurupadu where a hoard of Satavahana coins along with sculptured slabs were found. Both these sites in the East Godavari districts await detailed study.

By and large most of the sites in the north coastal sequence seem to have been abandoned by the end of the Satavahana period. The Mahayana sites are invariably located on fertile planes drained by river systems indicating an adaptation to rice cultivation on a massive scale after the demise of trade in the 2nd century of the Christian era. It is likely that the agriculture base before the collapse of trade was entirely aimed at local consumption and in relatively fertile circumstances meant partly for the food security of adjoining urban centres. None of the sites during the period of trade depend entirely on agriculture as a means of sustenance. With the end of trade the balance in the mode of production had titled towards small agricultural holdings that were not in a position to sustain entire Buddhist establishments. Subsequently a number of sites were abandoned. The local population seems to have scattered

*sunset at salihundam monastery. north coastal andhra.*

into smaller communities adapting the ritual constructs of the Buddhist phase, especially within the mother-goddess cults. Temples were now being built that had rituals native to such cults in the past when they were getting acculturated to early Buddhism. The fertility of river systems helped in the adaptation of Mahayana almost immediately or even in some cases simultaneously along with the last stages of trade and Theravada monastic establishments. These Mahayana establishments however had to initially rely on some sort of direct royal patronage to maintain the complex cultural phenomenon. Soon a laity took form around the rituals that entailed the Mahayana phase. One such extremely successful example could be found at Sankharam or Sangharama that is locally known as Bojjanakonda three kilometres from the town of Anakapalle.

The most interesting aspect of the north coastal sequence is the total lack of Megalithic sites. Scholars have attributed the absence of Megaliths to the distance from the Core Area and near impossibility of penetration due to the dense jungles that fringe the western boundaries of the north coast. Most of the proto-historic profiles of this region are derivations of late Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures that existed in the foothills and plains of the Eastern Ghats. The cultural base of these dwellings had successfully integrated with Buddhism of the early monastic phase. The omnipresence of Buddhism in the early historic period and the absence of any other contesting cult within the north coast sequence made it congenial for patronage throughout. Social impact of Buddhism is attested by the sheer magnitude of monastic establishments in the Mahayana phase despite the fact that they were very few compared to other places. It is however not known if there was a significant and distinct Mahayana phase that developed regionally.There are sufficient number of clues that emerge for such an assumption during the Tantric phase.

The ritualism of the Mahayana phase seems to have dissipated effortlessly into other cults that were based on the Buddhist model of religions organisation. This dissipation sees to be relatively constant in the East Godavari district. There are two glaring examples for the above assumption. Pithapuram or Pisthapura was an ancient trading centre with strong Buddhist affiliation. It was made a second capital during the Eastern Chalukyan regime. A huge complex that includes the seat of the goddess Purahutika, one of the famous 18 Saktipithas is of supposedly Buddhist origin. The temple is presently called the Kukkutaramam. The meaning of Kukkuta is a cock, the vehicle of Kumara or Skandha. There were among the Mahasanghikas a sect by name Kukkuttikas also known as Gokulikas who believed that the entire world was red hot or live coal and therefore is full of misery. The Kukkuteswara temple could have been the Kukkutapadavihara of Pisthapura. The famous Saiva shrine at Daksharamam was probably also a Buddhist Vihara that was converted into a temple in the early medieval phase. The temple has in its sanctorum a large 'Linga' measuring two stories. The so-called Linga is actually a remnant of Ayaka pillar, very similar to the one found at the Amareswara temple at Amaravati or the ancient Dhanyakataka in the lower Krishna valley. The word Aarama suffixed to both these shrines is also an important reason to believe that they might have been Buddhist establishments.

*an overview of vijayawada on a winter evening. once an ancient trade hub it still remains so. lower krishna valley.*

**lower krishna valley**

The land between the southern banks of the river Godavari and the northern banks of the river Krishna seems to have been sparsely populated during the early historic period except towards the delta of the River Krishna and towards the costal areas of the Guntur district. There is a huge dry plain combining the transitory zones of Telangana and Rayalaseema towards the western fringe all of which can be called the lower Krishna valley. The passes in the Eastern Ghats towards the Rayalaseema and towards the outer area of Telangana allowed movements of people in the proto-historic period. Megalithic settlements dating from around the last millennium before the Christian era can be found all over the dry plane of the lower Krishna valley. By the beginning of the early historic period, a number of urban centres had come up even towards the coast. In many ways these urban centres were clustered migrations from the Telangana region or extensions of the already existing Megalithic settlements.

Apart from the urban centres a large area was dotted with late Neolithic and Chalcolithic complexes that were quickly adapting to the use of iron that facilitated dry land agriculture. The Eastern Ghats and its foothills in the lower Krishna valley had a large base of hunting-gathering communities that could be seen as extensions from the middle and late Neolithic settlements, which had successfully adapted to iron by the early historic phase. Iron and its subsequent utility allowed an immense lot of interrelatedness that was very useful in making the lower Krishna valley a singular cultural sequence. The three district models of production namely trade, agriculture and hunting-gathering was to integrate even more closely by the time Buddhism had made its foothold in the lower Krishna valley.

The earliest known Buddhist sites are towards the coast at Dhanyakataka, Vaddamanu and Bhattiprolu followed closely by Jaggayapeta, Majeru and Gudivada with all of these sites being dated to the 2nd quarter of the third century and the first quarter of the second century before the Christian era. The Buddhist establishment at Vaddamanu, some 10 kilometres northwest of Dhanyakataka might have been established at the same time as Dhanyakataka some time in the 3rd century BCE. There are Buddhist settlements

at Vaddamanu atop the hills locally unknown as Chinakonda and Pedakonda. Robert Sewell first explored the site in 1887. Subsequently, excavations yield Northern Black Polished Ware, Black and Red Ware, Rouletted ware and other variations of early historic pottery. The site also yielded punch-marked coins from the pre-Mauryan level along with Satavahana, Sada and Ikshvaku coins in continuation with brick structures, sculptured panels, inscribed pot shreds, label inscriptions in Brahmi on stone and terracotta. Some of the inscriptions bare affiliation to the Bhattiprolu relic-caskets inscriptions that are presently being dated to the 3rd century BCE.

There is also a rock cut inscription on the ledge of a cavern in the southern slope of Pedakonda, which speaks about a certain king called Somaka. He might have been a local chief or even the head of all the trading guilds active in and around the Vaddamanu-Dhanyakataka area. There is a tendency usually to attribute imperial status to Somaka of the Vaddamanu inscription and Kubiraka of the Bhattiprolu relic caskets. Further still, some historians refer to these kings as forerunners of the Mauryans and Satavahanas, which is, untrue.

The lower Krishna valley was dominated by trading guilds and urban centres in the pre-Christian era. Each of these urban centres was in-charge of consecrating certain rituals as laying foundations to a Buddhist Stupa complex or facilitating a Buddhist Aarama as in the case of Vaddamanu. The exact nature of transition from the polity of trading centres to the final growth of monarchical influence is not clear from the available data. The fortified wall at some distance from the Dhanyakataka Mahastupa along with its purpose is yet to be made clear. In the past, the presence of fortification, have led scholars to believe that the lower Krishna valley, and at least some of its urban centres were directly controlled by the Mauryan regime that now looks highly unlikely though not improbable.

The most significant aspect of Buddhism in the lower Krishna valley is the existence of a number of Buddhists sects. According to the Sri Lankan chronicles there were at least eighteen different sects Buddhists after the Buddhist council at Pataliputra organised by Asoka. Of these four sects had their base in the lower Krishna valley prominent or an often-occurring sect seems to be those that end with the suffix Saila, the meaning of which needs discussion.

*terracotta fragment; vaddamanu. 2nd century BCE. lower krishna valley*

An early inscription from Dhanyakataka mentions the term Seliyanam, meaning the members of a certain Saila Sangha. There are other inscriptions that mention Seliyanam Mahavinayadhara, which is to be understood as members of a Saila Sangha who were adepts in the Mahavinaya. As mentioned earlier the Mahasanghikas who had broken up during the Second council had formed their own version of the Buddhist Vinaya that they called the Mahavinaya. The break up of the Mahasanghikas is another subject that attracts a lot of attention from scholars. The Sri Lankan chronicles mention some name like the Rajagirikas, Siddhartikas, Purvasaila, Aparasaila, Hemavatikas, Vajjiniyas, Uttarapathakas, Hetuvadins and Vetullakas. It is however not know that if these sects were regional variations of the same sect or distinct schools that branched off the Mahasanghikas.

Of the first four the Purva and Apara Sailas were predominant in the lower Krishna valley. Scholars often understood the terms Purva and Apara as earlier and later denoting the time of their establishment but it is now increasing being read as the geographical direction of a Buddhist establishment or in other terms Purva is east and Apara is west. The occurrence of Uttarasaila amongst the Saila sects is also a base for such an argument. The exact location of the sects and their establishments is again a long drawn controversy. It appears that the monks identified themselves in accordance to the place where they had been ordained, which makes Dhanyakataka, Purvasaila and Nagarjunakonda or Sriparvata, Aparasaila. Both of these seemed to have branches spread across the lower Krishna valley. Alluru in the Krishna district is identified, as Purvasaila while Ghantasala or the ancient Kanatakosala is Aparasaila. The Uttarasaila is usually identified with Jaggayapeta or the ancient Velagiri. But the confusion does not end there. There is another troublesome word Chaitya Saila that is to be convincingly identified. Some scholars identified Chaitya Saila with Sanchi since a Chaitya or a Stupa adorns its top. It is most certain that the structure at Sanchi was started during the reign of Asoka and it is not know whether it was previously called Chaitya Saila.

It is more likely that the Chaitya Saila could be identified with Dhanyakataka rather then Sanchi since the Sri Lankan chronicles and some late Tibetan sources confirm this by taking the whole argument towards a certain Mahadeva who was excommunicated from the Mahasanghikas two hundred years after the Nirvana of the Buddha, roughly around 285 Before the Christian era. The Mahadeva in question and his followers founded the Chaitya Saila sect at Dhanyakataka. Probably the deviations amongst the Chaitya Saila gave rise to new sects, which called themselves Purva, Apara and Uttara Sailas. Although the three sects have root exclusively in the lower Krishna valley, the cult of the Chatiyakas was fairly common in the western Deccan especially at Ajanta, Nasik and Junnar. Some scholars are of the view that the entire sequence of sites within Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh could be seen as Saila cults for the reason that nearly all of them have Chaityas and most of them are situated on hilltops. As stated earlier the investigative focus is yet to shift from looking at the monasteries in isolation. The idea that the word Saila could be attributed to any Buddhist monastery atop a hill is a rather naive way of dealing with cultural history.

Moreover, without the inclusion of data collected from the habitation zones in the plains the argument that the Saila sects had dominated the entire realm of Buddhism would be hazardous guesswork grounded purely on literary and available archaeological data. Further the contention hampers the regional context of Buddhism while favouring a monolithic explanation based on generalisations. These sects have been given a place beyond the cultural sequence of the lower Krishna valley, which seems highly doubtful if these sects had any importance at any point during the early historic period, with their hierarchies based entirely in the lower Krishna valley, as the names seem to suggest. In fact it would be more relevant to find reasons for the prominence given to sects in the lower Krishna valley.

From the times of the earliest urban centres the trade guilds had been active sponsors to Buddhist establishment. The ritual nature of the Mahasanghikas and its divisions allowed a healthy variance of sects that is not always appreciated in any discussion on the subject. The proliferation of sects

allowed each urban centre depending on its prosperity to patronise a particular group of Buddhist monks subscribing to a particular sect or evolving their own view of Buddhism. This applicability had a positive effect on the growth and spread of Buddhist establishments throughout the lower Krishna valley. The economic aspect led to the further enhancement and invigoration of these establishments through out the early historic period. By the beginning of the Christian era trade was diminishing at a quick pace. Large establishments however found succour in the new adaptability towards agriculture. This allowed unhindered continuation of Buddhist establishments which is unknown to any other culture sequence within ancient Andhra, which scholars interpret mistakenly as the model survival of Buddhism that they attribute, in a rather bizarre way, to an unspecified "cultural sophistication" cutting across historical periods of the coastal districts which is actually nothing but thinly veiled parochialism.

The area of fertility in the lower Krishna valley could have been proportional to the population sustaining on land during the early historic period when trade was flourishing. Apparently there seems to have been a huge stress on the land after the demise of trade that took a good two centuries of the Christian era to get consolidated into a regular pattern of sustenance. It was during this period and the transitory period that preceded it that could have laid the foundation for the wide spread of Mahayana in the lower Krishna Valley. It is highly probable that most of the ritual texts of the Mahayana had their origin in Dhanyakataka and elsewhere. The Ikshvaku period with an established power centre based in the lower Krishna valley was instrumental in bringing large tracts of hitherto uninhabited land to cultivation. There are inscriptional evidences of Ikshvaku kings distributing ploughshares in a ritual manner. The former agrarian classes were already patronising local variances of Saiva cults that reached their peak during and after the Ikshvaku period. Mahayana had by then long taken root in the lower Krishna valley manifested in large monasteries with embellished art and huge laity. Mahayana was the model on which the Saiva and Bhagavata cults based their religions organisations. The earliest temples to be found in the Guntur district at Chejeral, Chebrolu, Bapatla, Sattenapalli and Nagarjunakonda itself have strong Mahayana Buddhist affiliation to the point of sometimes making it difficult to distinguish between them.

It would not be an exaggeration to suppose that Mahayana would have strongly influenced almost all of the rituals conceived by any cult in the early historic period especially in the lower Krishna valley. This is also another reason why Buddhism could survive there for a long period.

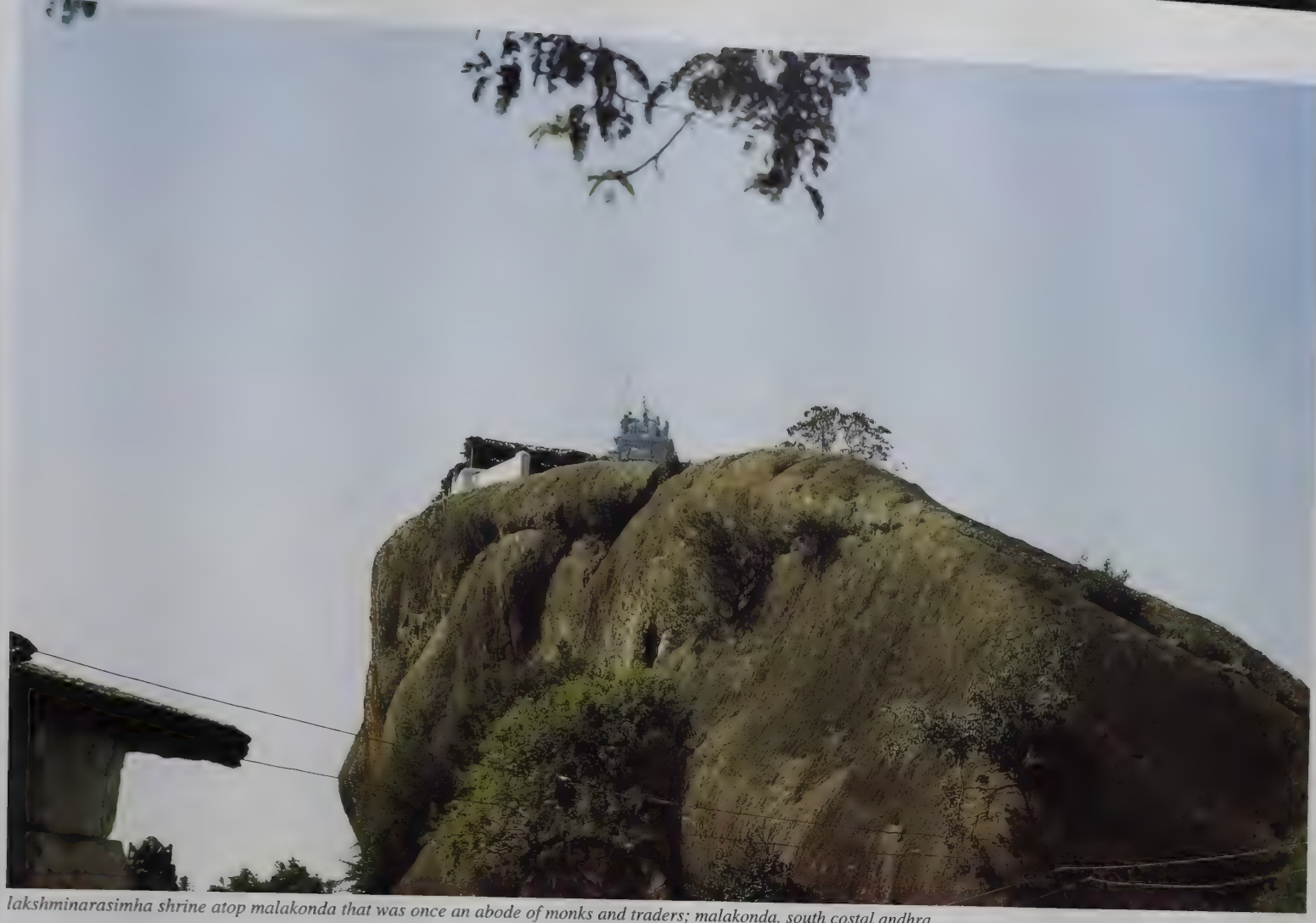
*an ancient trade route towards rayalaseema; malakonda. south coastal andhra.*

**south costal sequence**

In all there are twenty-two sites in the South coastal sequence spreading towards Kanchi. Incidentally, the site at Chandavaram and the nucleus at Kanchi are the only pre-Christian Buddhist monuments. The rest are assigned the period between the first and third centuries of the Christian era. It can be safely assumed that the sites must have had some pre-Christian era legacy on which the later sites were built. The sequence also gives us data about trade centres and then function. The various excavated sites show a large part of material culture was stone and metal based. Both were locally available which proves that there must have been guilds that traded finished goods through these trade routes. There is also ample evidence to prove that a large number of skilled labour were sustaining to trade of finished goods since a very early historic period. As stated earlier, the activity of trade grows in area and volume as one proceeds west. Incidentally, the establishment at Chandavaram is at the northwestern part of the south costal sequence.

These areas are dotted by a large number of early and late Neolithic sites that may or may not be concurrent with Chalcolithic and Megalithic phases. The Megalithic sites in the sequence are concentrated towards the middle and lower plains of the River Penna in the Nellore district. The rest are scattered towards the transitory zones having cultural exchanges between them is well documented. There is a general understanding that the Megalithic sequence within the zone was deeply influenced culturally by the late Neolithic. The Megalithic in the south coastal sequence unlike in the Core Area had not evolved into major urban centers. Despite an absence of major urban centers at least three Buddhist sites can be noticed within the peripheries of Jonnawada in the Nellore District. The etymology of 'Wada' is itself of interest since it denotes a town or a sprawling habitation. The aridity of this sequence is also reason for the lack any major urban base in the proto and early historic times. These ecological constraints made the entire zone unacquainted to any major cultural trend outside their own local cults based on fertility and the phallic symbol. The earliest theiroanthropic representation of Siva is found at Gudimallam in Chittor district.

By and large one could be certain that the existing nucleus of Buddhist zones would not have existed within this zone had it not been for the trade and trade routes. Malakonda in the Prakasam district is today home to a shrine dedicated to the god Lakshmi Narashima built sometime in the early medieval period or even much later. The shrine is situated on a hill overlooking a deep gorge to the south and the valley of the River Gundlakamma to the northwest. The hill has a number of natural caverns. On a ledge deep inside one such cavern is a single line inscription that donates the cave to Buddhist monks. The donation was made by



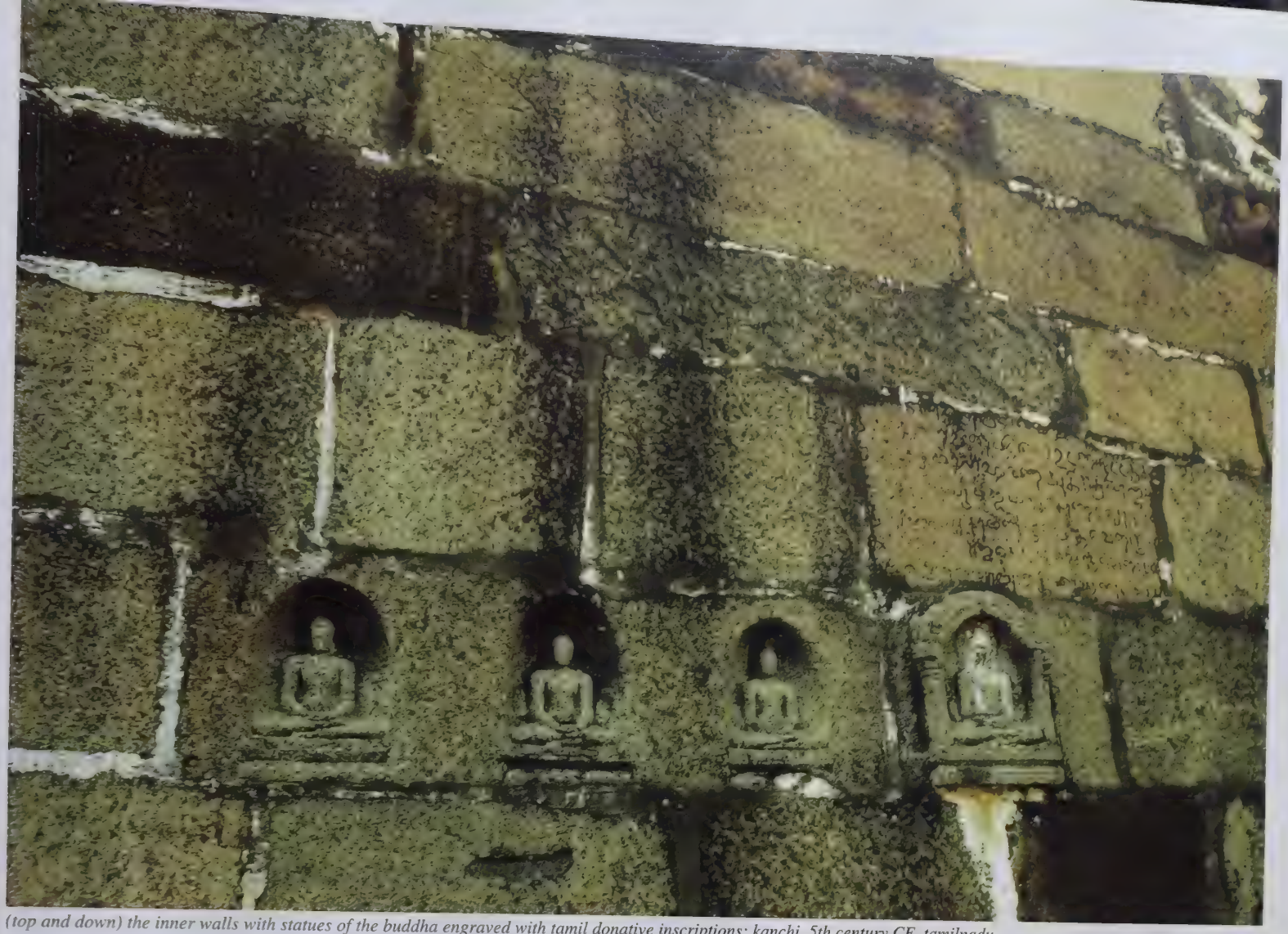
*lakshminarasimha shrine atop malakonda that was once an abode of monks and traders; malakonda. south costal andhra.*

a certain Veerasetti the son of Nandasetti, which the inscription mentions belonged to the Aravahala lineage. On palaeographic grounds the inscription in the southern variety of Brahmi is currently being dated to the 3rd century before the Christian era. Malakonda can now be added as the northern most in the list of natural caverns that are found down to the Madurai district in Tamilnadu. Buddhist monks occupied all of these natural caverns that had similar label inscriptions and coincidentally belong roughly to the same period, 3rd and 2nd century before the Christian era. The term Aravahala is of considerable interest. Aravahala or Aravala, Arava and Aruvelanadu seem interrelated.

Arava is a term used by the Telugus to indicate the Tamils. Some scholars opine that the area south of the lower Krishna Valley was at some point in history called Aruvelanadu, which could definitely not have be the most popular usage at least in the early historic period since it was always specifically referred to as Pukaratta or Pugi Rashtra and much later as Kammaratta or Karma Rashtra. There is however reference to the area as Velanadu throughout the medieval times, which again is seen as a reduced form of Aaruvelanadu. Apart from etymology we have no archaeological source other than the inscription at Malakonda that speaks only in terms of a person's lineage and not about the place of his origin. There could be another way of explaining this. Veerasetti probably was a Tamil merchant who frequented the natural cavern, which could have been a trading station frequented also by Buddhist monks. The area northwest in the Gundlakamma Valley could have been the ideal route to travel further west through Rayalaseema and to North Karnataka while avoiding the dense forests of the Nallamalla. These areas are dotted by places of Buddhist interest. Chandavaram is the nearest from Malakonda from where one could take the road towards Rayalaseema touching Nandaluru in the Cuddaph district proceeding in slightly southern direction towards Erragudi and Rajulamandagiri and towards the Bellary district with Maski and further north towards Sannati and Kanaganahalli. This could have the most travelled trade route for trade caravans coming from the Deep South.

The exact interrelationship between the trading and agrarian classes in the pre-Christian era is yet to be satisfactorily dealt with. A case study of Chandavaram and its immediate cultural vicinity was taken up that would be discussed separately. Trade reached a high point sometime in the first two centuries of the Christian era largely because of the seaports established at Chinna Gangam and Uppugunduru. In both these sites large hoards of Satavahana and Ikshvaku coins were found along with the famous ship-mast symbol of Siri Yagga Catakanni probably dating to the late quarter of the 1st century of the Christian era. The inland routes between the lower Krishna valley and Kanchi were supposed to be some of the most prosperous in the early historic phase. Kanchi had large Buddhist establishment

*the ekambareswara shrine dedicated to siva. kanchi. tamilnadu*



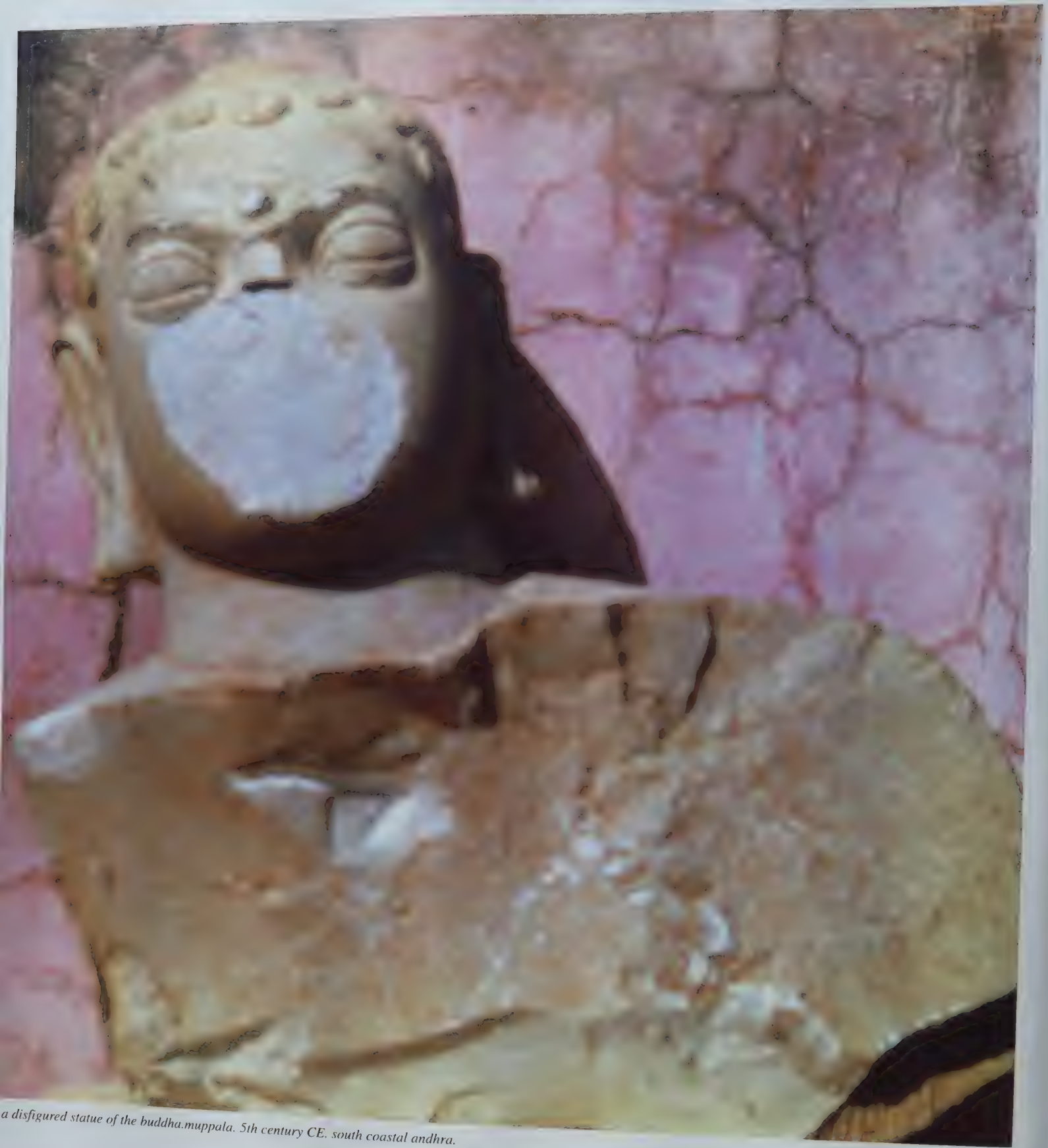
*(top and down) the inner walls with statues of the buddha engraved with tamil donative inscriptions; kanchi. 5th century CE. tamilnadu.*

dating back to the pre-Christian era. It was always considered part of Andhra until the early medieval times as can be ascertained by the example of Buddhaghosha who explicitly stated that Kanchi was a centre to nine Andhra Buddhist sects. The importance Kanchi seems to have touched a low after the Pallava occupation of the south coastal zone making Kanchi their capital. The early Pallavas were ardent Saivas.

According to the literary sources they subjugated the Buddhists. Some Mahayana texts originating from Kanchi seems to accuse the Pallavas of destructing Buddhist establishment in converting them to Siva temples. So far no independent study had been taken up to verify truth in the claim. We have come across at least one example at Kanchi where early Tamil Buddhist inscriptions and sculptural representations of the Buddha were found high on the exterior walls of Ekambaresvara shrine dedicated to Siva. Kanchi has a looming presence of being the seat of Buddhist learning with Buddhaghosha and Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen and the Shaolin temple, to its credit. Despite such a glorious Buddhist past very little can be found today at Kanchi.

The rise of cults and demise of trade in the south Coastal zone proved fatal to Buddhism. The aridness and the lack of adaptability to agriculture, disallowed Buddhist monasticism anywhere else except in the seaports towards the coast and a brief period during the Mahayana phase. Here trade did not bring in the existence of any large urban centers but it certainly removed the stress of sustaining purely on the basis of agriculture at least during the early historic period. By the end of the second century of the Christian era organised Saivism spread throughout south coastal zone and Kanchi.

Saivas received royal patronage from the Pallavas and soon grew to be an important religion with Srisailam on the border between the south coastal zone and Rayalaseema to



*a disfigured statue of the buddha.muppala. 5th century CE. south coastal andhra.*

be one of the most important centers. Buddhism on the other hand sustained frugally. There are no evidences of grand constructional activities anywhere which is so typical of Mahayana phase elsewhere. Much of any large-scale construction if any at all, were entirely sponsored by Buddhist establishments in the neighbouring lower Krishna valley. The lime stone casing slabs, pillars and other such architectural effects originated in the lower Krishna valley.

Marble pillars from the Ikshvaku period found at Manikeswaram in Addanki Mandal of the Prakasam district, the entire sculpture found at Chandavaram are two good examples. Constructions made in the locally available stone, a weak variant of Khondolite is found at nearly all the Mahayana sites in this sequence. There is also a remarkable continuum in the plan and execution of certain monasteries to those in the lower Krishna valley probably

*the upputeru canal used by ships in the ancient times leading into the sea; uppugunduru. south coastal andhra.*

for a dearth of skilled construction labour after the demise of trade although we don't have any direct evidence to support such argument.

A unique factor of the south coastal sequence that excludes it from the other three is the violence that seems to have marked the last phase of Buddhism. There is compelling evidence from nearly every site to that affect. All the fifteen sites in the Prakasam district show signs of blatant Vandalism. Chapping away the nose or the entire head in very many instances purposefully can be observed in the images of the Buddha. At Kanaparti, towards the coast there hero-stones erected for people who had killed Buddhists.

These stones Veeragallu, as they are known in Telugu, were erected in honour of people who showed exemplary courage in defending a village, the dignity of woman, in showing loyalty towards a king, a friend or towards a village. To this list of altruistic deeds are added the acts of violence towards Buddhist to whom tribute was bestowed by erecting a hero-stone. The violence probably is simultaneous with the growth of organised Saiva sects with their base in the Nallamala forests sometime in the early years of the 4th century of the Christian era. This must have been the final end to Buddhism in South Costal Andhra.



*...ddha being beheaded. a figure on a horse; siva and his consort parvati; kanaparti. 6th century CE. south coastal andhra*

*the buddhist site at phanigir during excavation; (below) gold ornaments found at kondapur. 2nd century BCE. telengana.*

**western sequence**

The predominance of Buddhist sites on the coastal districts of the present Andhra Pradesh coupled with the interpretative short-sightedness that disallows perception to identify the Core Area as the earliest nucleus, from where there was a cultural spread, necessitates the identification and inclusion of sites in the Telangana, Vidarbha and Maharashtra regions as a western sequence. The interrelatedness of culture comes through history in terms of the eastward spread of populations from the Deccan since prehistoric times. The Satavahana empire that extended from Maharashtra to Andhra Pradesh is also reason pivotal to the examination of the areas west of Coastal districts in Andhra Pradesh as a sequence that had a huge bearing on Buddhist history of early Andhra. The distinction of the western sequence as a cultural sphere is due the fact that the earliest possible textual mention of

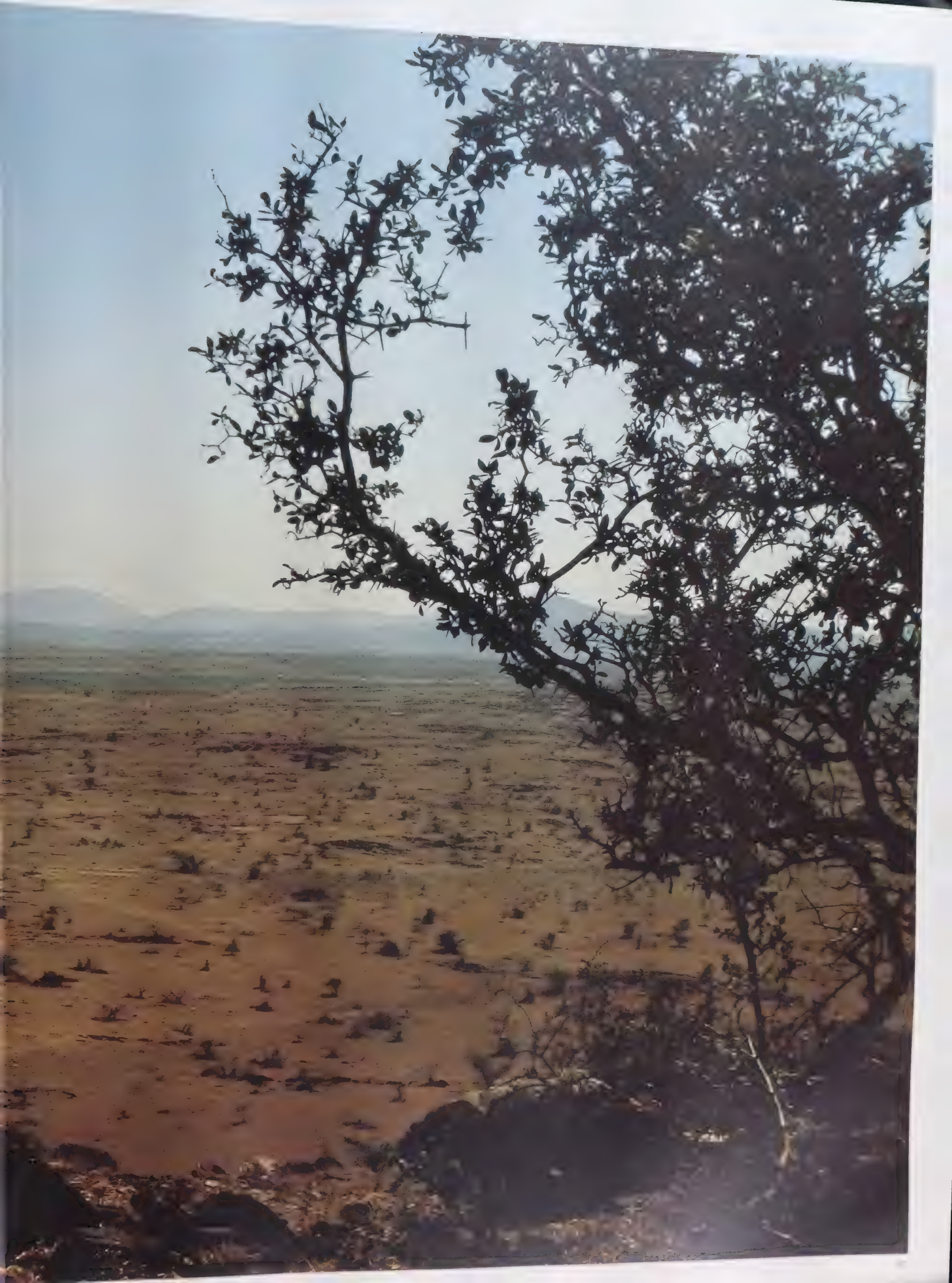
Andhra in Buddhist terms refers to them as living in present areas of Telangana and Vidarbha. Within this sequence are major differences owing to the variance of culture from Telangana to Vidarbha to the western Deccan.

Further, there are distinct clusters within Vidarbha and Telangana, although few in number, that are very different from the rock cut sites in western Maharashtra. The terrain in Telangana and Vidarbha are semiarid and remain so well towards the west coast. Like the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra has a thin strip of fertile land but less habitable because of the steepness of Western Ghats towards the east and also because the land and sea ratio is as thin as a hundred meters at some places, which steadily increases as one proceeds south towards the Konkan coast.

The eastern most boundaries of the western sequence are the sites in Nalgonda district that include Tirumalagiri, Phanigiri, and Gajulabanda. These sites in the former domain of the princely state of Hyderabad were identified in the early 1940s. It was only in the recent past that a full fledged excavation was conducted at these sites. The earliest and the largest site at Phanigiri is presently being excavated. A detailed report on the finds is awaited. By what has emerged until now it seems like the sites at Gajulabanda and Tirumalagiri were subsidiaries to Phanigiri dating back to the early Christian era.

Large hoards of Satavahana and Ikshvaku coins along with the geographical location of the sites signify them to be of a transitory nature. In specific instances like the tradition of sculpture, Phanigiri cannot strictly be part of the western sequence due both to the reasons of affinity and geographical nearness to the lower Krishna valley. Apart from the Buddhist establishments at Dhulikatta there are sites at Pashigoan and Kotalingala in Karimnagar. Both of them seem contemporaneous to the site at Dhulikatta or even slightly earlier. In recent years Northern Karnataka with its sites at Sannati and Kanaganahalli have been added to the existing circuit.

*the rugged terrain from a hill near adilabad, telengana.*



*trial holes carved into rock. wood was drilled and watered periodically making it bulge and crack the hard rock from which monasteries were carved. western deccan.*

Western Maharashtra was always been the biggest hub to trade and exchange in the early historic period. The consistency of trade despite its demise elsewhere is remarkable. The providence resulted in some of the most sublime examples of architecture to be noticed in this sequence. Western Deccan withered a different type of activity where Chaitya temples and Viharas were being excavated from live rock. This rock cut mode was a direct result of the types excavated by Asoka and Dasaratha in Bavapar and Nagarjuni hills near Gaya in Bihar for the Ajivaka ascetics. Its development primarily in the hills of the Western Ghats, in the second century BCE and the the first half of the second century CE seems to have been in part dictated by the nature of the terrain and the material.

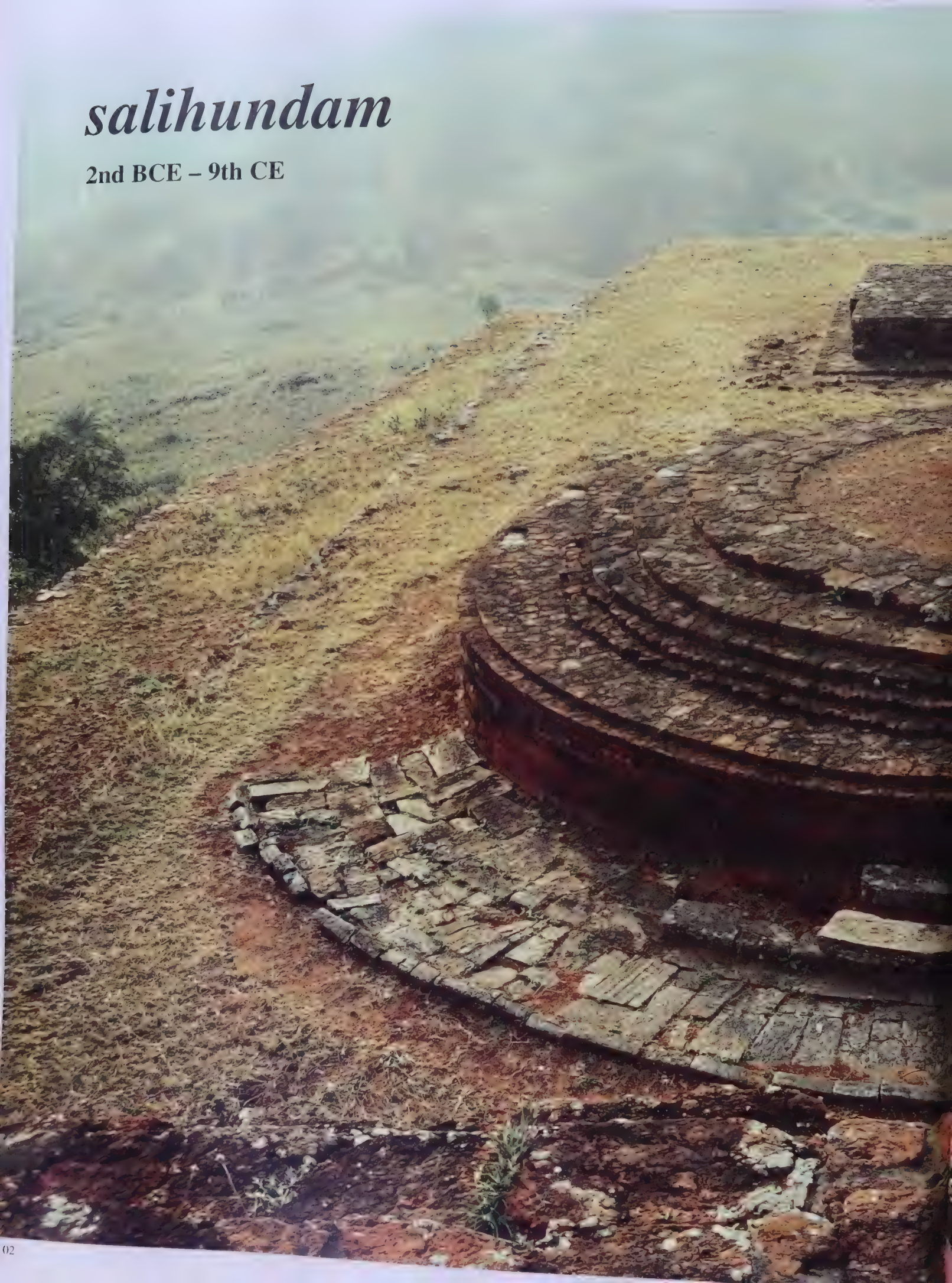
The horizontal state of amygdaloidal and cognate trap formations laid in considerable thickness where the edges of these terminate in perpendicular cliffs providing the ideal space for excavation. These fine monuments were hewn out of the live rock by means of the pick and finished by the dexterous application of the chisel, as examination suggests. While the pick was used for the preliminary work, the cutting and finishing were done entirely with the chisel and hammer, in the hands apparently of the finest craftsmen who were at once a quarryman and sculptor. These rock-hewn forms, no doubt expert achievements in themselves, involved no constructional principles nor do they display in their forms any functional property. Their members, such as columns and arches, were not adjusted or designed to support load, carry weight or counteract thrusts. Thus, from a strict point of view this kind of work may not be architecture but sculpture on a grand and magnificent scale. The first excavations were Theravada its character with Chaitya halls and Viharas forming about ten groups all copies in rock of constructional proto types of less permanent material, wood and brick. The noteworthy examples include the excavation at Bhaja in Poona district, Kondane in Kolaba district, Nasik, Junnar and Karle in Poona district and Kanheri near Bombay. These Chaitya halls embody many interesting features and are facsimiles in rock of structural Aaramas and Viharas.

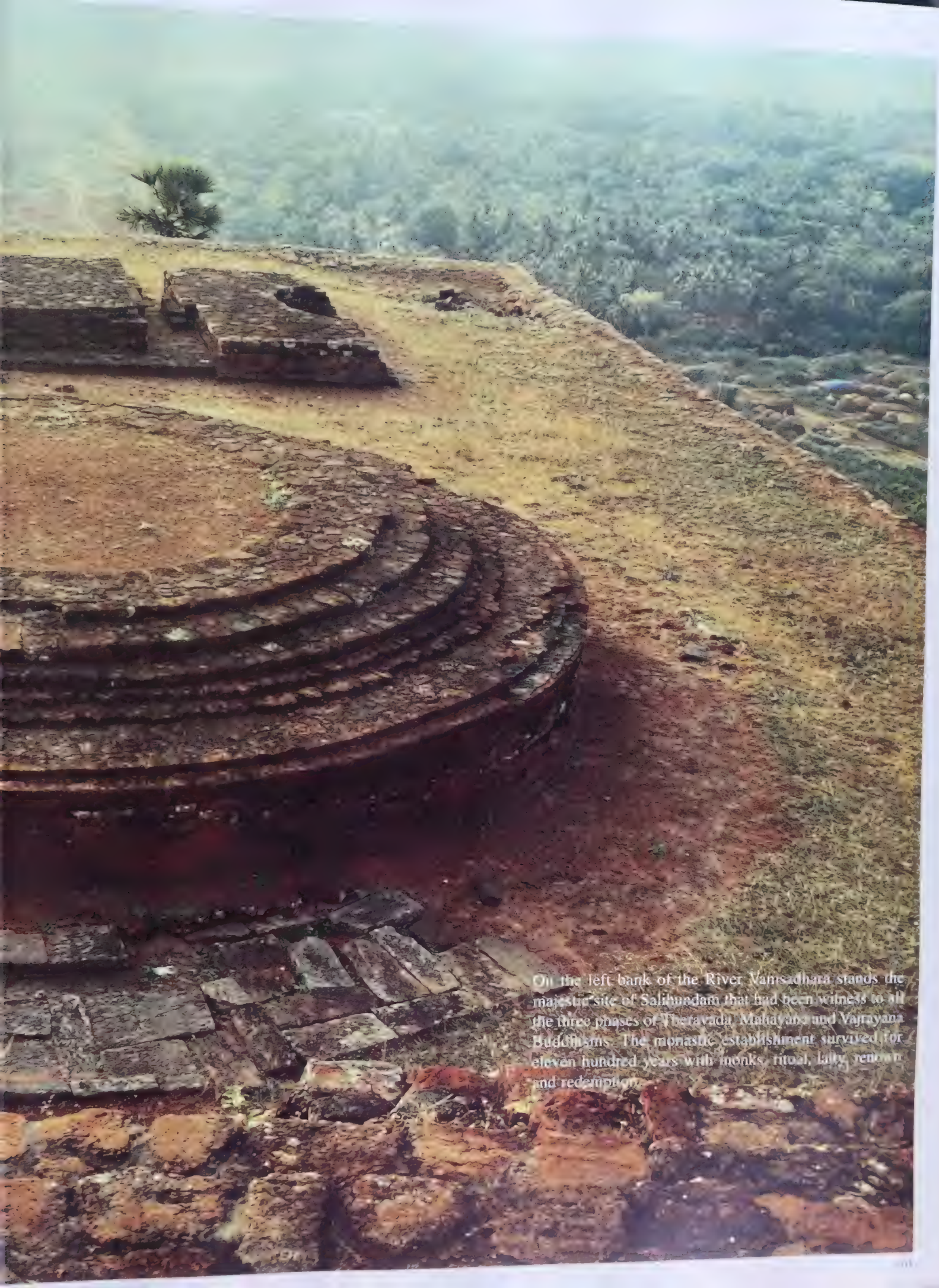
# *tracks of the wheel*

In 1797 Colonel Colin Mackenzie discovered vast ruins of ancient Dhanyakataka and its Buddhist legacy. In a span of a little more then two centuries nearly 200 hundred Buddhist sites have been excavated in the present states of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The count keeps increasing each passing year. Early Andhra was perhaps the biggest hub of Buddhism in the entire Indian sub-continent. Despite meticulous research in piecing together the frozen epoch, the real pace of the wheel is best left to imagination to which its tracks are the only testimonies.

# *salihundam*

**2nd BCE – 9th CE**

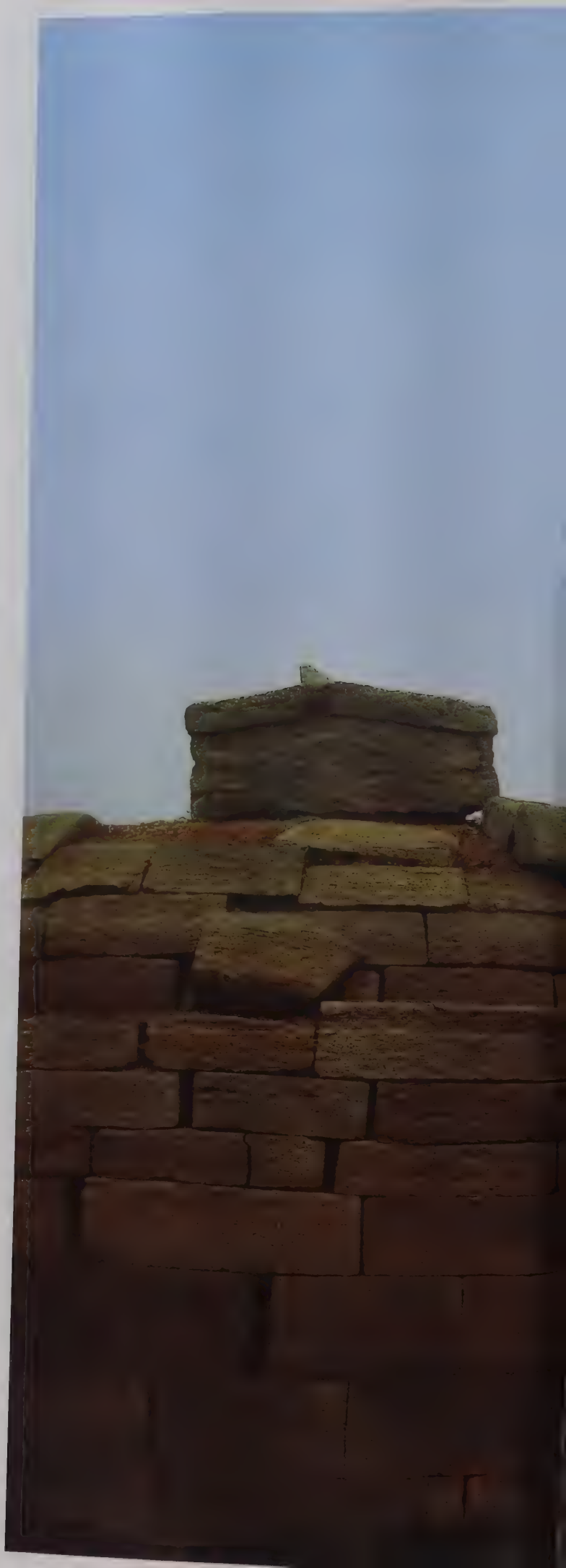


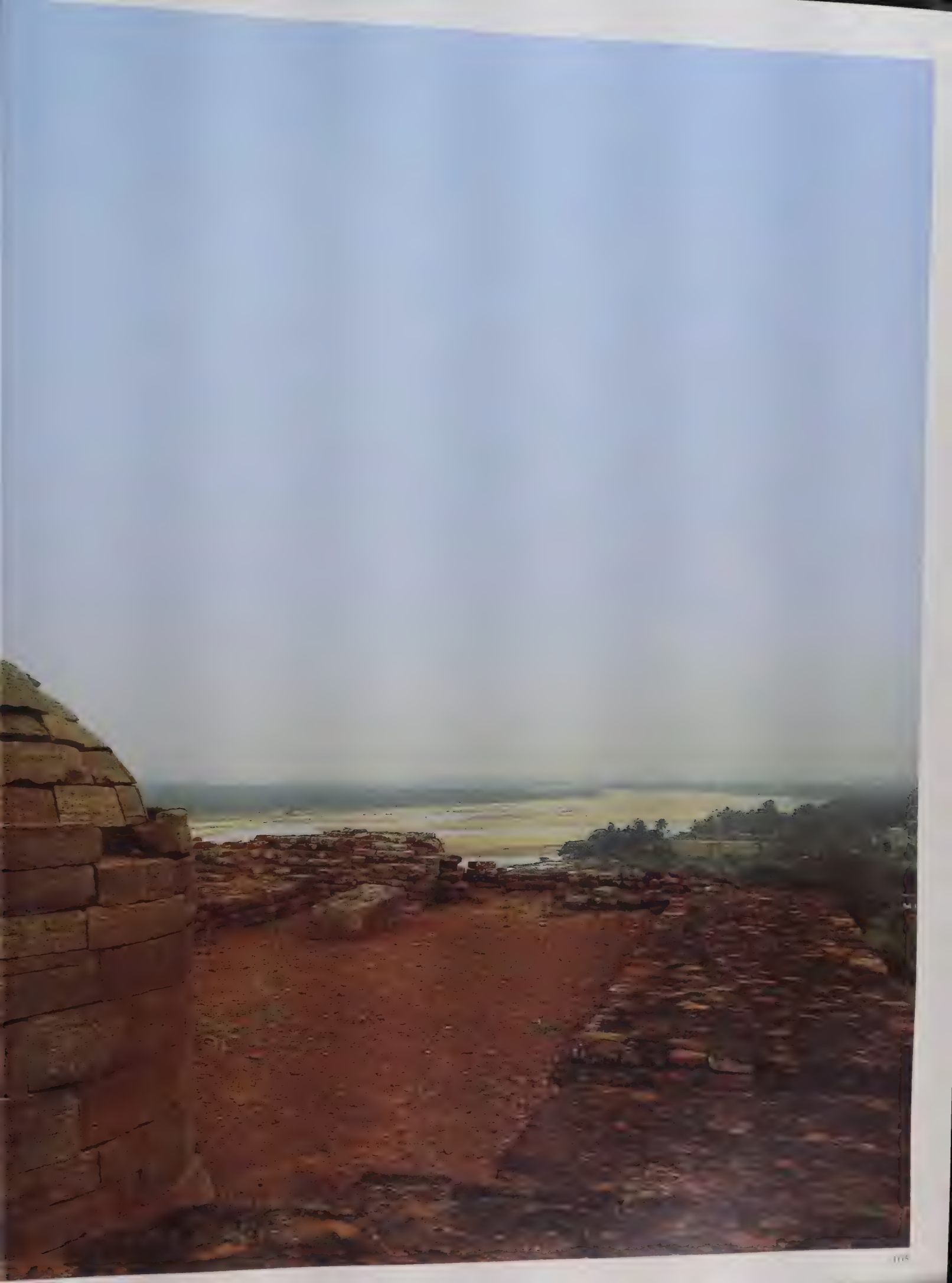


On the left bank of the River Vannisadhara stands the majestic site of Salihundam that had been witness to all the three phases of Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhisms. The monastic establishment survived for eleven hundred years with monks, ritual, laity, renown and redemption.

The buddhist establishment was discovered by the linguist Gidugu Ramamurthy Pantulu in the early years of the twentieth-century after it was abandoned sometime in the late quarter of the ninth. The earliest excavation was in 1919 under Longhurst and later by R.Subrahmanyam in 1954 when relic caskets were exhumed. The material culture of the site were spread throughout the villages nearby.

Salihundam is an Oriya word meaning "the hill of rice". It was originally called Salipataka, which probably meant, "rice market". It seems to have been closely knit to the nearest port town of Kalingapattanam that was in ancient times the capital of Kalinga. Some pot shreds found on the hill call it Maha Uga Pavate or the hill near to the great sea.





Salihundam was probably established immediately after the Kalinga war of Asoka and could have been directly patronised by the Mauryan regime. A label inscription was found during the 1954 excavation with a legend Dharmarano Asokasirino or belonging to the great king of Dharma Asokasiri. The script of the label however belongs to the second century of the Christian era and there was no other king with such a name ruling the area during that time. Probably it was to mark the memory of Asoka, who established and patronised the site when the monastery was upgraded in the second century. The River Vamsadhara provided for all the needs of the monks on the hill.It was also the time when the monastery came under the influence of Mahayana.

The significance of the Buddhist establishment at Salihundam seems to have influenced the growth of Mirror sites in the vicinity. In the year 2000 an entire monastery dating to 1st century of the Christian era was excavated some distance away on the right banks of the River Vamasadhara at a place called Jagatipadu. The material finds had large number of inscribed artefacts some of which speak about monks of the Maha Uga Pavvata or Salihundam. The early centuries of the Christian era also saw the growth of sites southwards of Salihundam.

The transition to Mahayana seems to have been both smooth and instant. Trade was touching its lowest ebbs or had already ceased as an active mode of production. Donative inscriptions since the later parts of the second century are profuse. More than royalty the simple people in the vicinity of the hill were instrumental in sustaining the monastery. The fertile region of the lower course of the Vamsadhara was soon converted to rich agricultural land that was sufficient base to nourish the abode. By the end of the third century of the Christian era Salihundam had become the centre of Vajrayana Buddhism. It was one of the earliest monasteries to follow the Tantric path. The Yogacara School seems to have been a major influence going by inscriptional and sculptural evidences since the early mediaeval age.

Some of the abandoned monasteries saw resurgence due to the growth of Satavahana power especially during the period when Dhanyakataka was made the capital. Sea trade could have provided base to prosperity despite the dwindling activity of inland trade. Tradesman or sailors who were thriving on exports to southeast Asia are mentioned in most of the donative inscriptions pertaining to constructions in the monastery after the 2nd century CE. Although the record is not as meticulous as at Salihundam the sites in the north coastal cultural sequence saw a sudden spurt of activity during the period between the 1st and the 3rd centuries of the Christian era. Much of the up gradation of monastic construction was during that period. Despite the surplus there seems to be no evidence of an agrarian class as influential as the traders. The land holdings probably remained small and the area under irrigation during the early historic period could have also been less owing to the thick forests towards the west and northwest of Salihundam.

# *ramathirtham*

**2nd BCE – 7th CE**

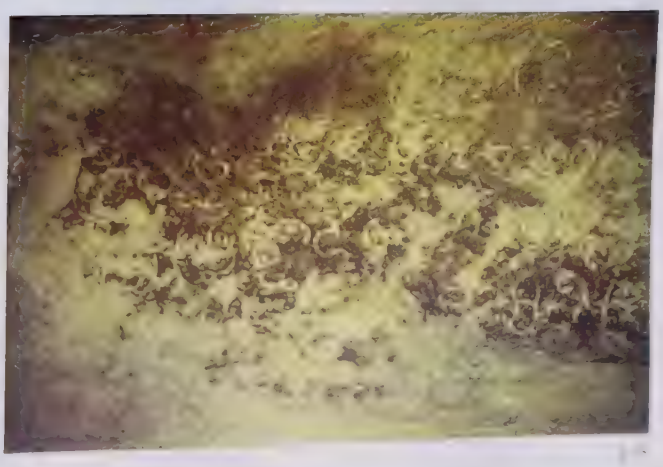
Ramatirtham is a huge monastic complex situated on a granitoid hill very close to the modern industrial town of Nellimarla in the Vijayanagaram district. The hill has an elevation of nearly 400 meters. A slope on the summit makes it look like two hills. One is called Durgakonda and the other Gurubhaktakonda on which Buddhist monasteries were discovered by Alexander Rea in 1909. The earliest nucleus of the site date backs to the 2nd century of the pre-Christian era. Iron objects and other metal artefacts were excavated from the foothill.

Two large apsidal Stupas with circumambulatory paths dating to the early quarter of the 2nd century CE were discovered. Apart from these a number of brick Chaityas were discovered belonging various epochs from the 1st century to 3rd century CE going by the evidence of material culture. The brick size and the construction plan are very much in line with sites of the north coastal region.

The area around the hill does not have any perennial water source and seems to have been the same during the time the monastery was occupied. Large rock-cut cisterns were found atop the summit to store water. Initially, the monastery was probably not occupied throughout the year except during the four months of the rains. The local inhabitants today depend exclusively on the monsoon and ephemeral sources for water. Rice is the major crop despite scant rainfall.It was probably first harvested in the earliest phases of the monastery above the hill. The area in and around Ramathritham is drought prone triggering mass migrations in the recent past, in search of work.

Among the many clay tablet inscriptions found on Ramathirtham the most intriguing is with the legend that is being read as 'Siri Sivamaka Vijayaraja Selasahagasa' referring to an abode of monks who were established by a certain king called Sivamaka Vijaya. Scholars opine that Sivamaka may have been one of the Sada kings that ruled most of southern parts of Kalinga sometime in the early centuries of the Christian era. Nothing is known about the Sadas or their lineage except for a few more inscriptions found in the lower Krishna valley. The Selahaga or Saila Sangha referred to in the clay tablet inscription is often interpreted in accordance to the Saila Schools of the Mahasanghikas that existed in the lower Krishna Valley. The Saila Sangha of Ramathirtham probably just indicatedthemonks that lived on the Ramathirtham hills. There were no other mentions of Saila anywhere else in the north coastal sequence.

A roughly carved figure of a naked asectic is found inside a natural cavern on the Gurubakhtakonda monastic group. The hill was probably occupied by Jaina asectics sometime after the 4th century of the Christian era. The intial occupation of the monastery must have followed a period of abandonment in the late 2nd century. The Jainas might have stayed for a brief period till around the 5th century when the Buddhist monastery was re-established. Going by evidence from material culture Tantric Buddhism flourished at Ramathritham.



# *pavurallakonda*

**2nd BCE – 2nd CE**

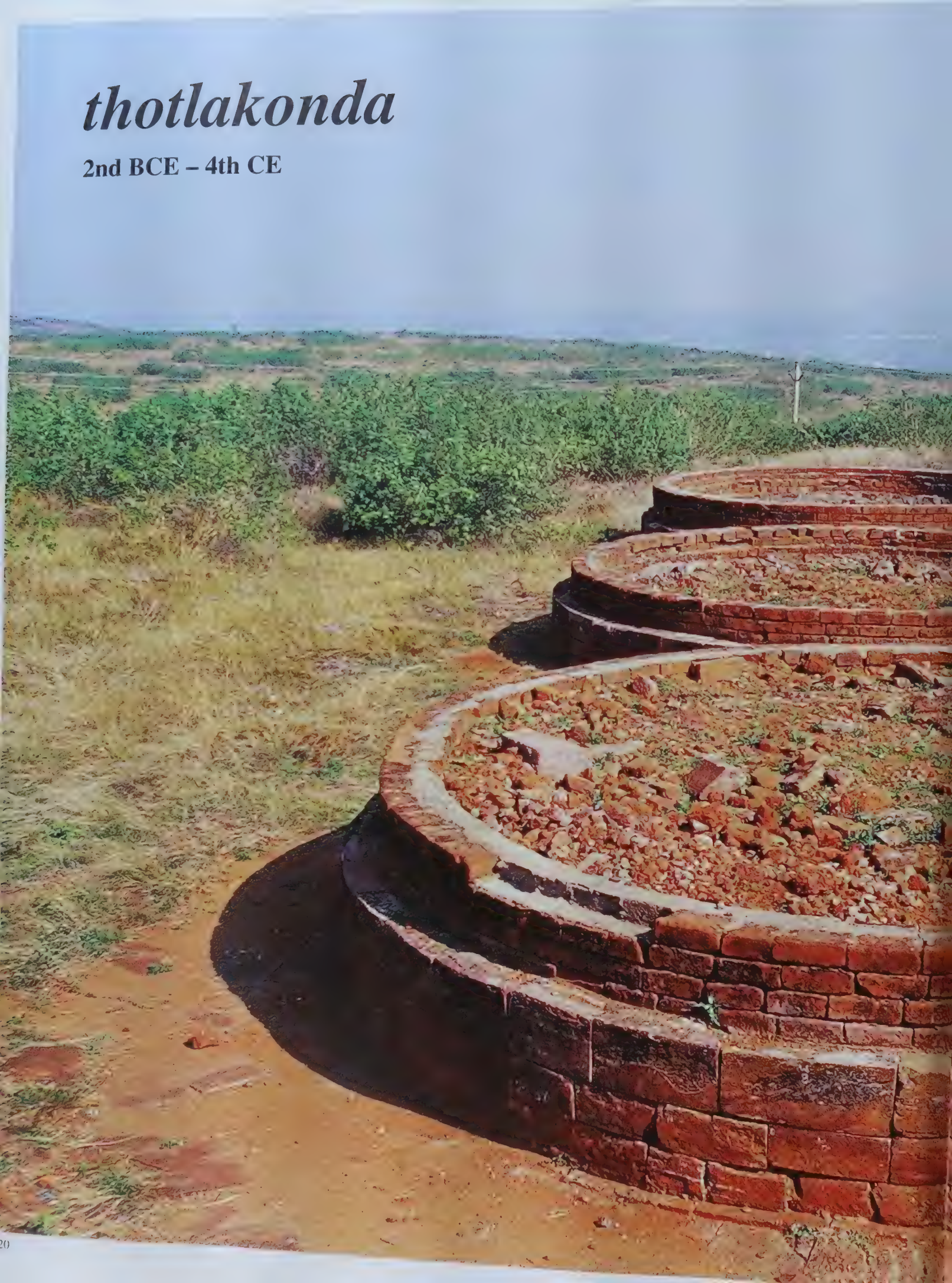
Pavurallakonda is on the summit of the hill that has a shrine dedicated to the lord Narasimha at Bhimunipatnam. The picturesque hill has one of the oldest Buddhist monastic establishments in the region. Bhimunipatnam or Bhimli was once a Dutch township there are a few construction of that era atop the hill. Strangely there have been no Dutch notices of the Buddhist remains on the hill. It was only in the early 1990's that it was explored and excavated by Dr. B. Subrahmanyam.

A large monastic complex with huge Stupa and votive structures were unearthed. Apart from these a number of artefacts belonging to the early Christian era were found that included Roman and Satavahana coins. Major construction activity on the hill seems to been during or slightly after the 1st century CE. A large number of cells attached to the monastery speak of a fairly high occupancy. A Khondolite slab was found carved with the image of what looks like the depiction of the mythical Yakkha that probably dates to the 2nd century CE, which is the only sculpture, found on Pavurallakonda. The style of the carving has no affinity to the lower Krishna valley and seems to have been in some local idiom.

Large cisterns were carved from rock to store water. A major part of them date back to the pre-Christian era. With the growth of habitation around the foothills of Pavurallakonda in modern times these cisterns are still used in summer months or during long spells of aridity when water becomes scarce, which was also probably the reason why two more monastic establishments were constructed at Thotlakonda and Bavikonda, very close to Pavurallakonda.

# *thotlakonda*

**2nd BCE – 4th CE**



Thotlakonda is second in the series of three Theravada monasteries that were discovered and excavated in the early 1990's. Situated 16 kilometres away from Vishakapatnam in the Mangamaripeta Mandal, a Mahastupa, apsidal and circular Chaityagrihas, votive Stupas, rock-cut cisterns, a congregational hall, refractory, hall, pathways, Roman and Satavahana coins and stucco fragments datable from the 2nd century BCE to 4th CE were found along with number of Brahmi label inscriptions.

Lars Fogelin an American scholar made a detailed study of the site and surveyed the habitation zone in the foothill to establish that the site was actively patronised by communities living in the vicinity of the monastery. There seems to have been a ritual relationship between the monks on the hill and the laity on the foothills, where a number of votive Stupas were found. Cairn burials were found on Thotlakonda that were probably remains of laity.

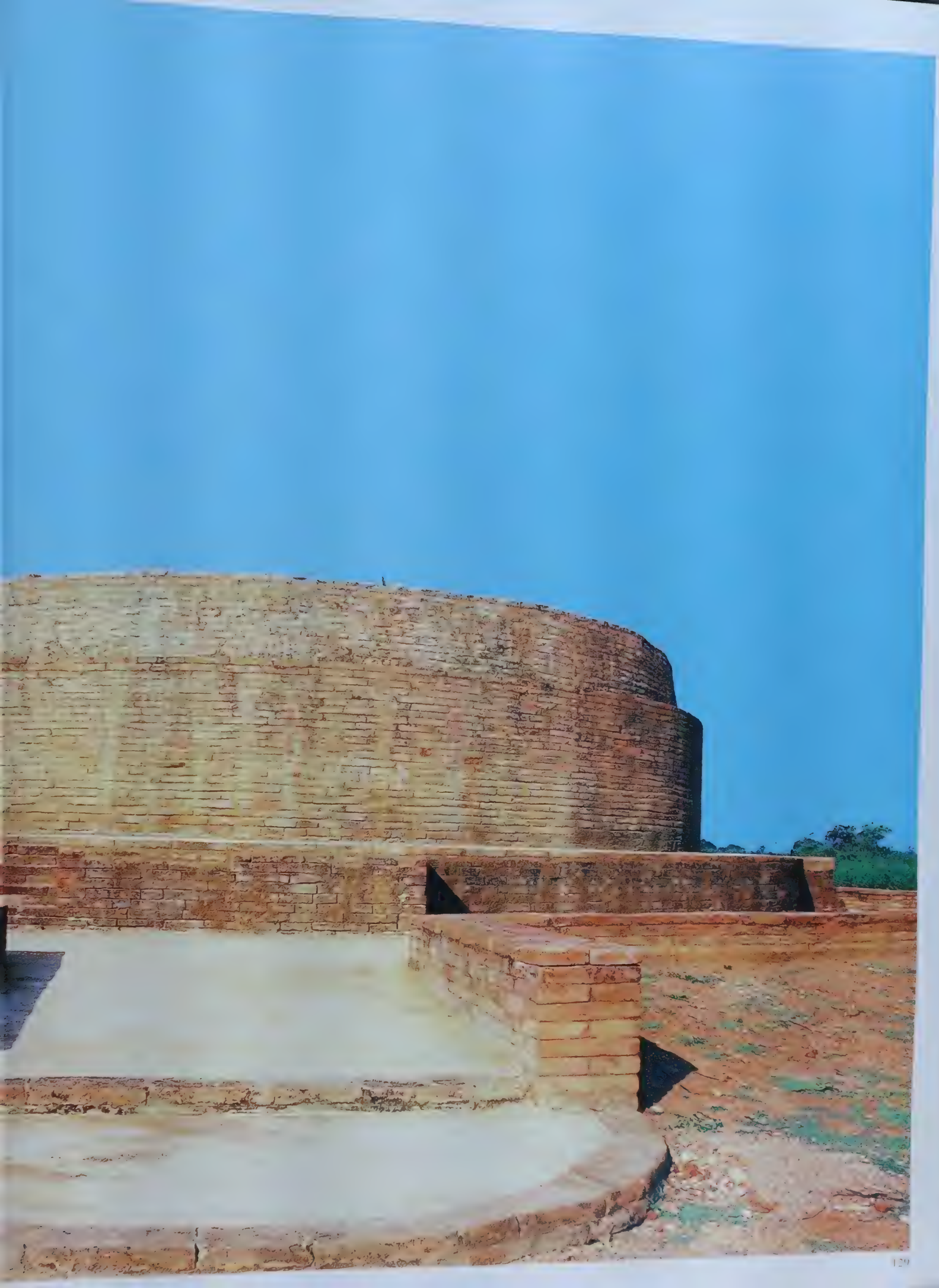
The laity in the foothills and from within the region donated generously for the constructions of the monastic establishments. A large part of the sustenance could have originated from sea-traders who probably used the monastery's resources but strangely donations made by such tradesmen are not known from the inscriptions that were deciphered.

# *bavikonda*

**2nd BCE – 2nd CE**

Bavikonda seems to be the smallest in the series of three monasteries and was also the earliest to be abandoned. The site has a large Mahastupa and number of monastic cells dating to the start of the Christian era. It is the highest in terms of altitude amongst the two other monasteries and was actually discovered when a naval reconnaissance helicopter was scouting for a place to build an airbase in 1983.

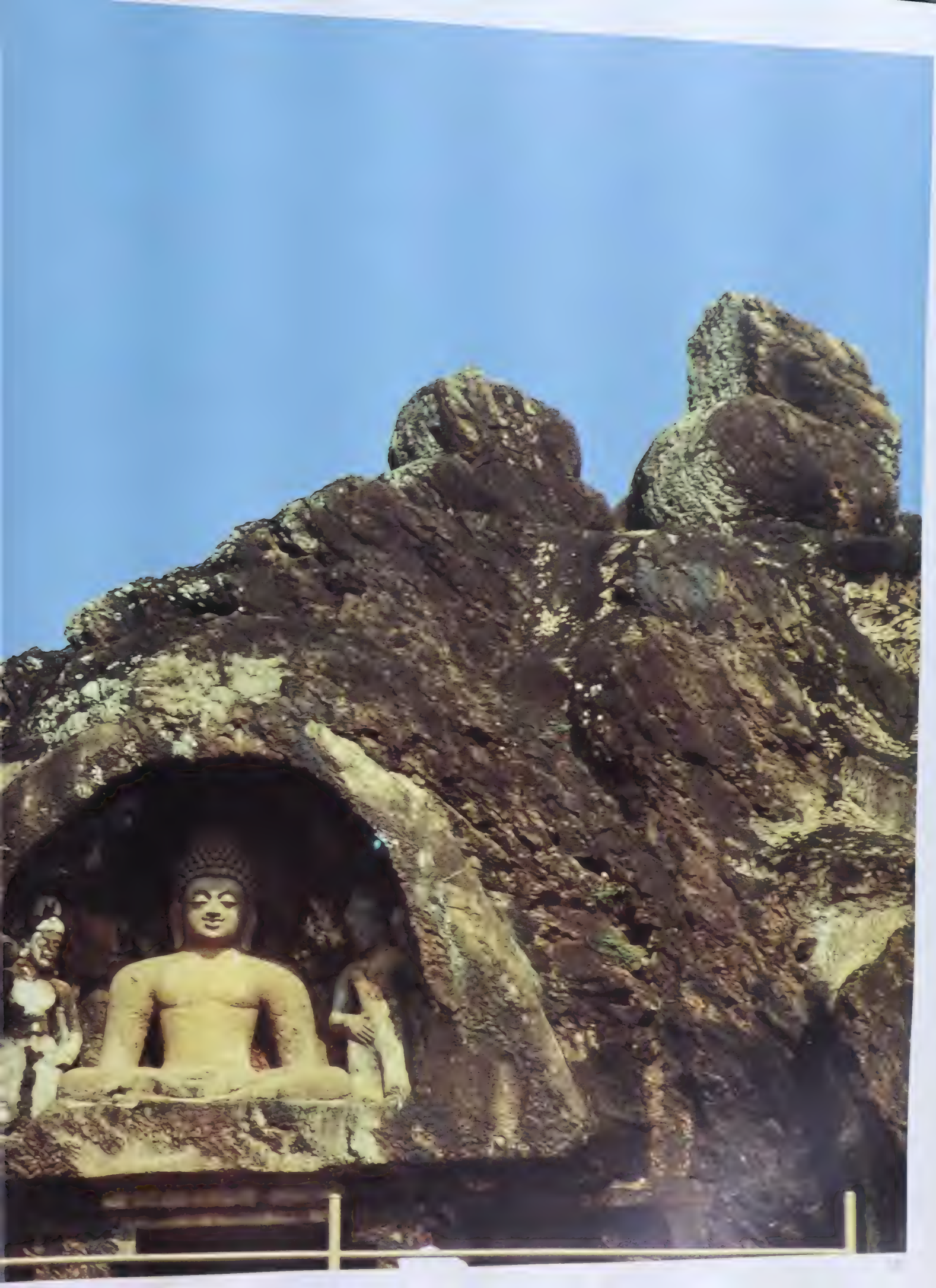
Bavikonda was probably called Senakagiri going by inscriptional evidence from the neighbouring Thotlakonda where a couple belonging to the area near Bavikonda donated a water trough. Syenaka in Sanskrit denotes a mythical eagle that is of great significance in the Jataka tales about the past life of the Buddha. One interesting find at Bavikonda is an embellished stone barrel that was probably used for mixing dye to make robes for monks. Such barrels were found at several other Buddhist sites in Andhra but this seems to have been the earliest known. There were probably more such barrels that were used in dyeing clothes, which was also a speaks of the means of sustenance that the monastic establishment adopted.



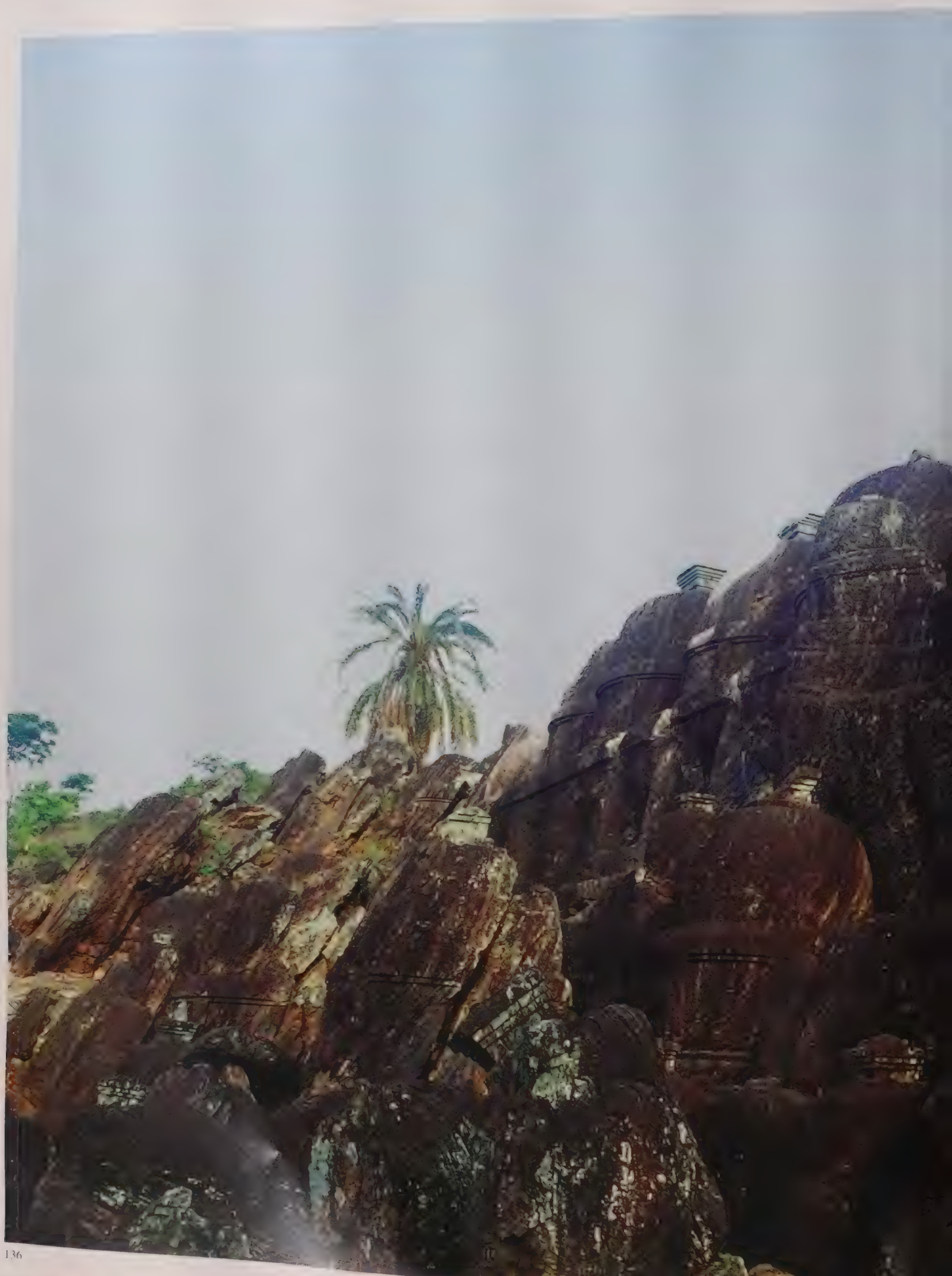
# *bojjanakonda*

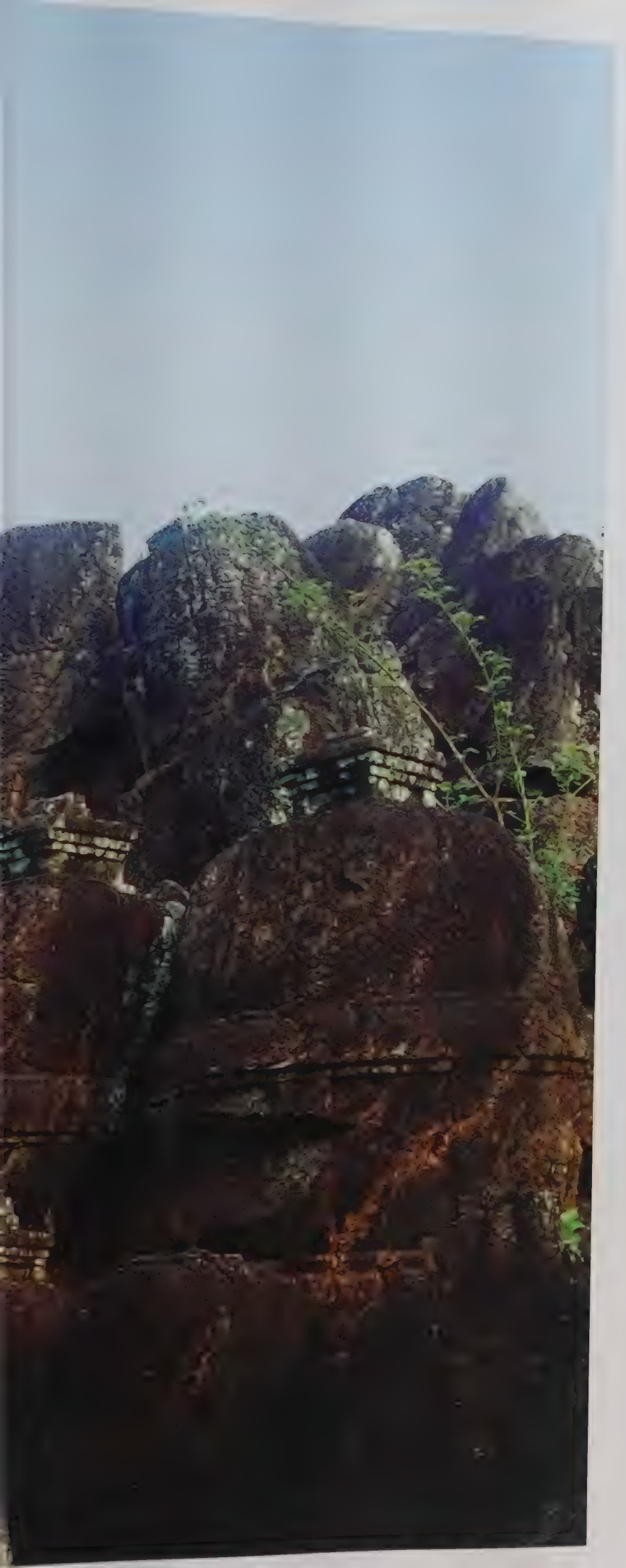
## 2nd BCE – 7th CE

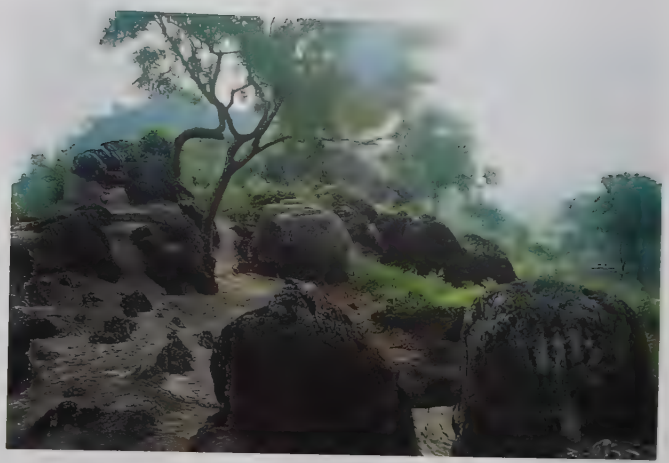
Bojjanakonda is the popular name of the Buddhist monastery that is also called Sankharam or Sangharama situated in the village of Marturu just three kilometres outside the modern town of Anakapalle. It is on a low hill amidst lush green fields and pasture lands. In 1909 Alexander Rea conducted excavations on the hill to bring to light a vast monastic complex, rock-cut cells with huge carvings of the Buddha and Stupas that were carved from rock. The earliest structure on Bojjanakonda was on the summit of the hill that probably consisted of simple brick built structures dating to the 2nd century of the pre-Christian era none of the original structure remains today. Most of it was upgraded with bigger structures in the late 2nd century CE when the monastery came under the sway of Mahayana.



Bojjanakonda is one gleaming example of how the Buddhist monasteries sustained themselves after the demise of trade. Donative inscriptions were not found despite the enormity of the establishment. It probably implies that the areas around Bojjanakonda must have successfully adapted to rice based agriculture along with a frugal network of regional trade that must have been the main source of sustenance to the monks. The large-scale construction work could have been intially through partial royal patronage and largely due to voluntary local initiative.

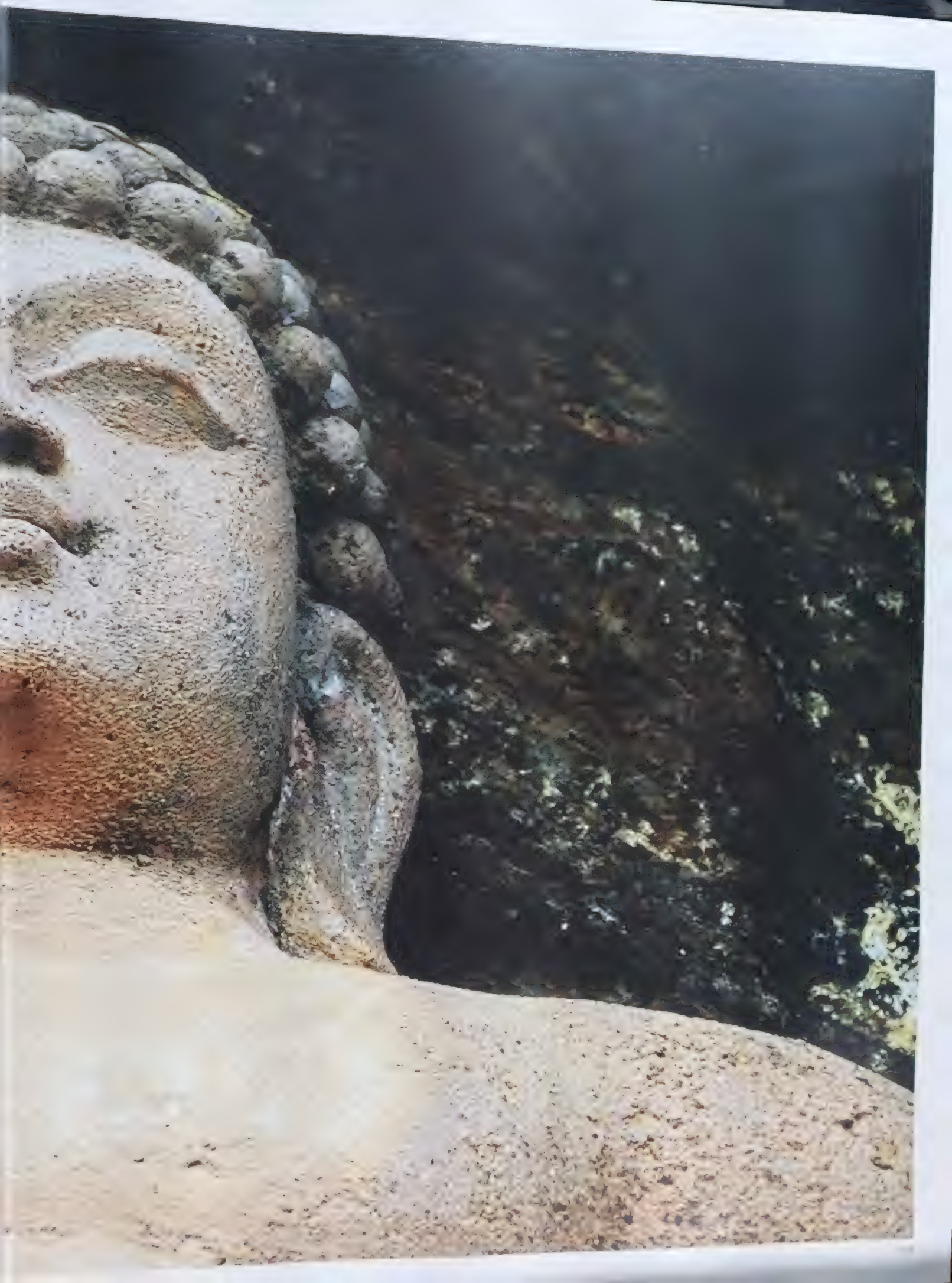






The entire low hill south of the main Sangharama popularly known as Lingalametta was carved into countless votive Stupa structures with two main structures on the lower part of the hill and a rock-cut cell. Much of the construction activity can be dated to the mature phase on Bojjanakonda around the 4th century CE that is yet another example to show the ritual attachment of the laity to the monastic establishment, a unique feat of survival despite the lack of trade or royal patronage.

The most fascinating aspect of Bojjanakonda is the presence of the Buddha statue upon the entrance to the two-storied rock-cut Stupa cave. It was probably made in the later half of the 4th century CE and somewhat similar to the Mathura style, which perhaps led scholars to suppose that the other figures within the Stupa chambers were also of the same School. The texture of the fine greyish-red sand stone, the poise, silence and above all the smile of compassion make the statue celestial.

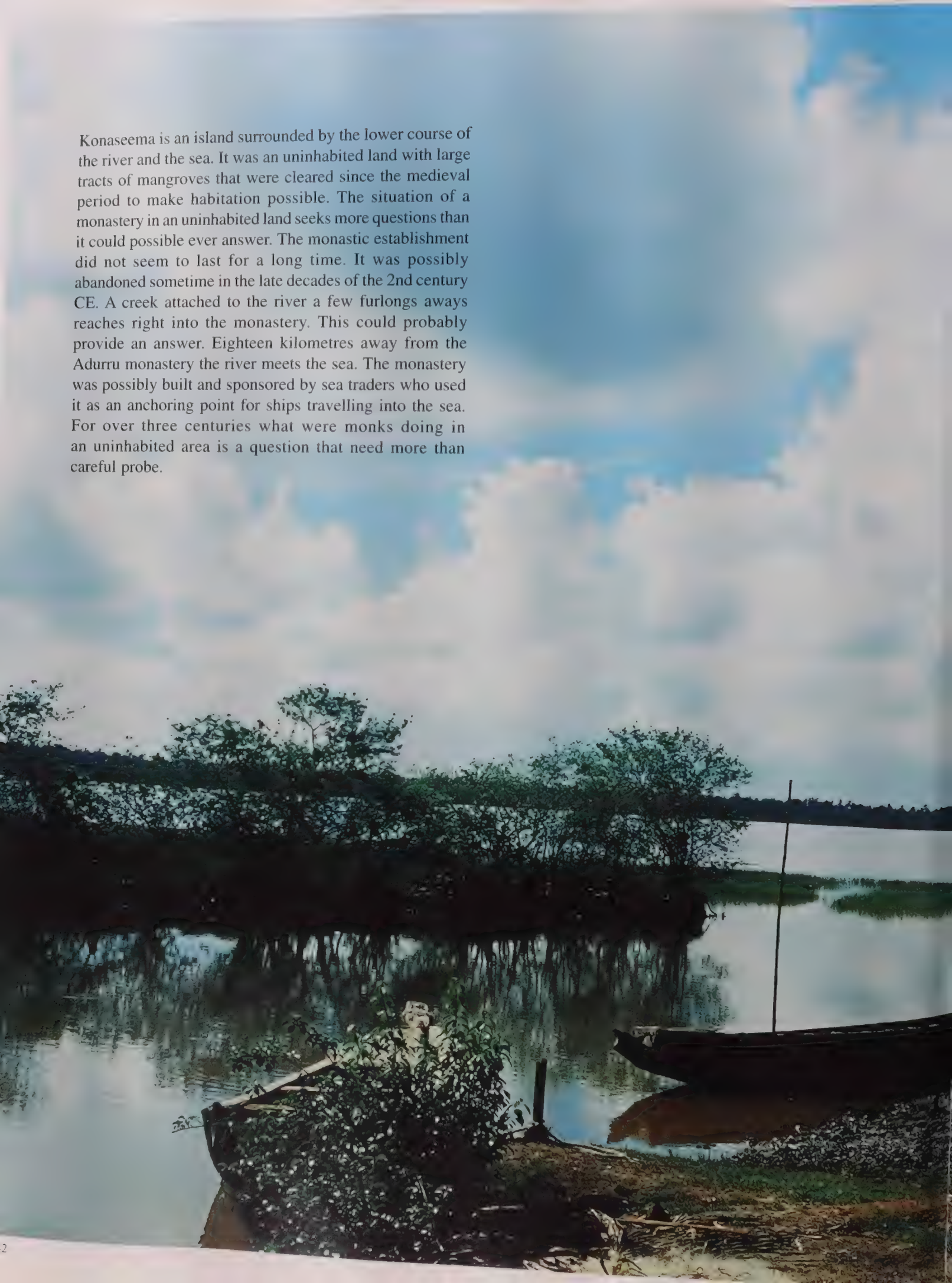


# *adurru*

**2nd BCE – 1st CE**

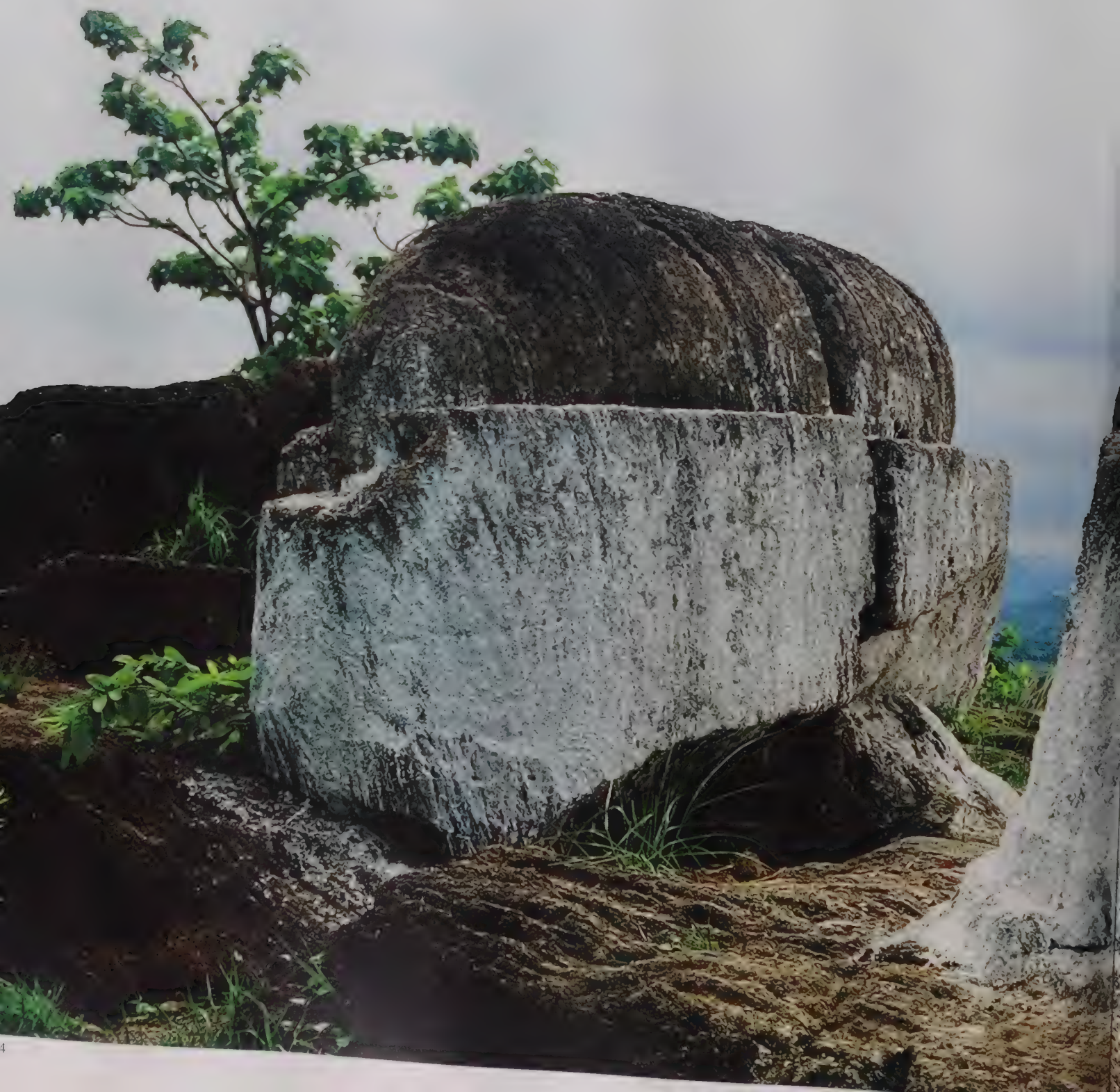
Adurru is situated deep inside an area called Konaseema, a deltaic formation where the river Godavari meets the Bay of Bengal. On the right bank of the Vasista Godavari lies the monastic complex with a Mahastupa, apsidal structures and a row of monastic cells. The earliest stuctures were probably rebuild during the 2nd century of the Christian era going by cart-wheel shaped construction of the Stupa.The situation of the monastery is itself a huge mystery about which there has been no proper study.

Konaseema is an island surrounded by the lower course of the river and the sea. It was an uninhabited land with large tracts of mangroves that were cleared since the medieval period to make habitation possible. The situation of a monastery in an uninhabited land seeks more questions than it could possible ever answer. The monastic establishment did not seem to last for a long time. It was possibly abandoned sometime in the late decades of the 2nd century CE. A creek attached to the river a few furlongs aways reaches right into the monastery. This could probably provide an answer. Eighteen kilometres away from the Adurru monastery the river meets the sea. The monastery was possibly built and sponsored by sea traders who used it as an anchoring point for ships travelling into the sea. For over three centuries what were monks doing in an uninhabited area is a question that need more than careful probe.



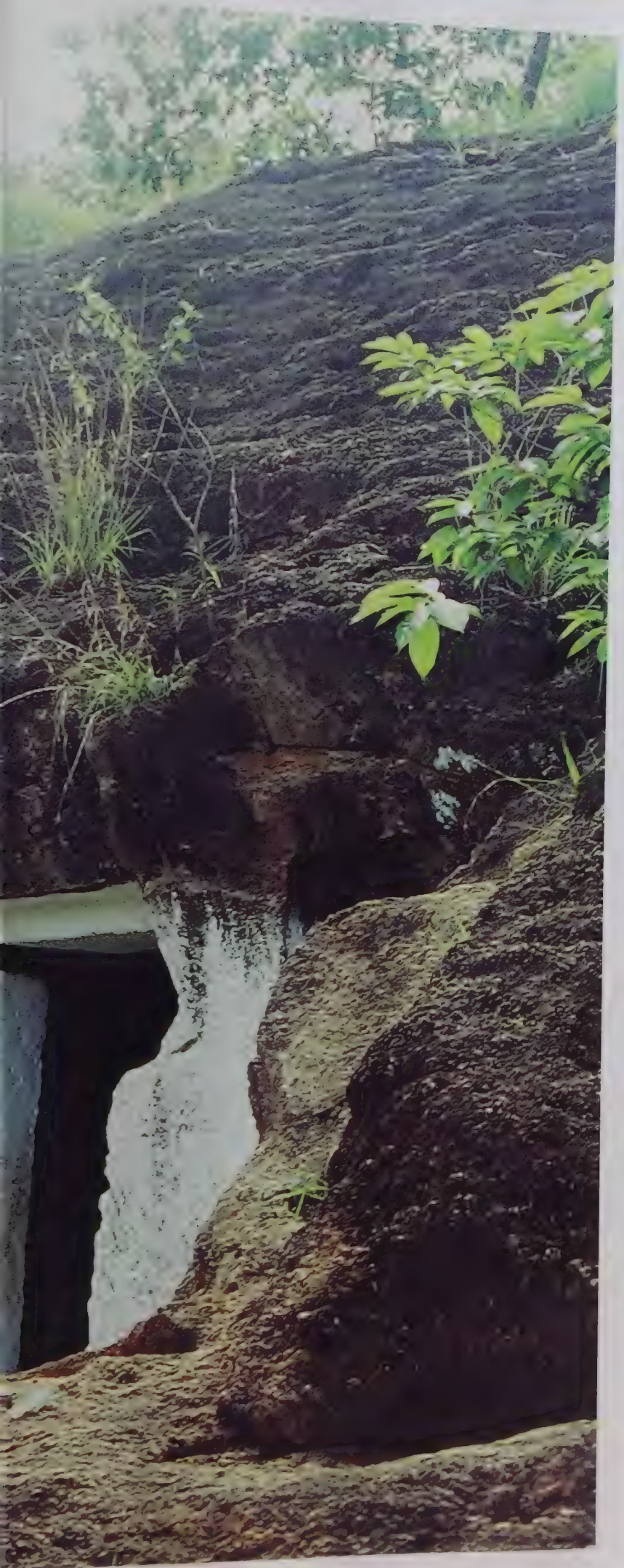
# *rampa errampalem*

**1st CE – 6th CE**



The Rampa Errampalem Buddhist monastery is situated on steep hill in the Gokavaram Mandal of the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. The historian B V Krishna Rao first discovered the site in 1934. It is popularly called Pandavulakonda or the abode of the Pandavas. Locals offer obeisance to the Pandavas who they think constructed the rock-cut caves.

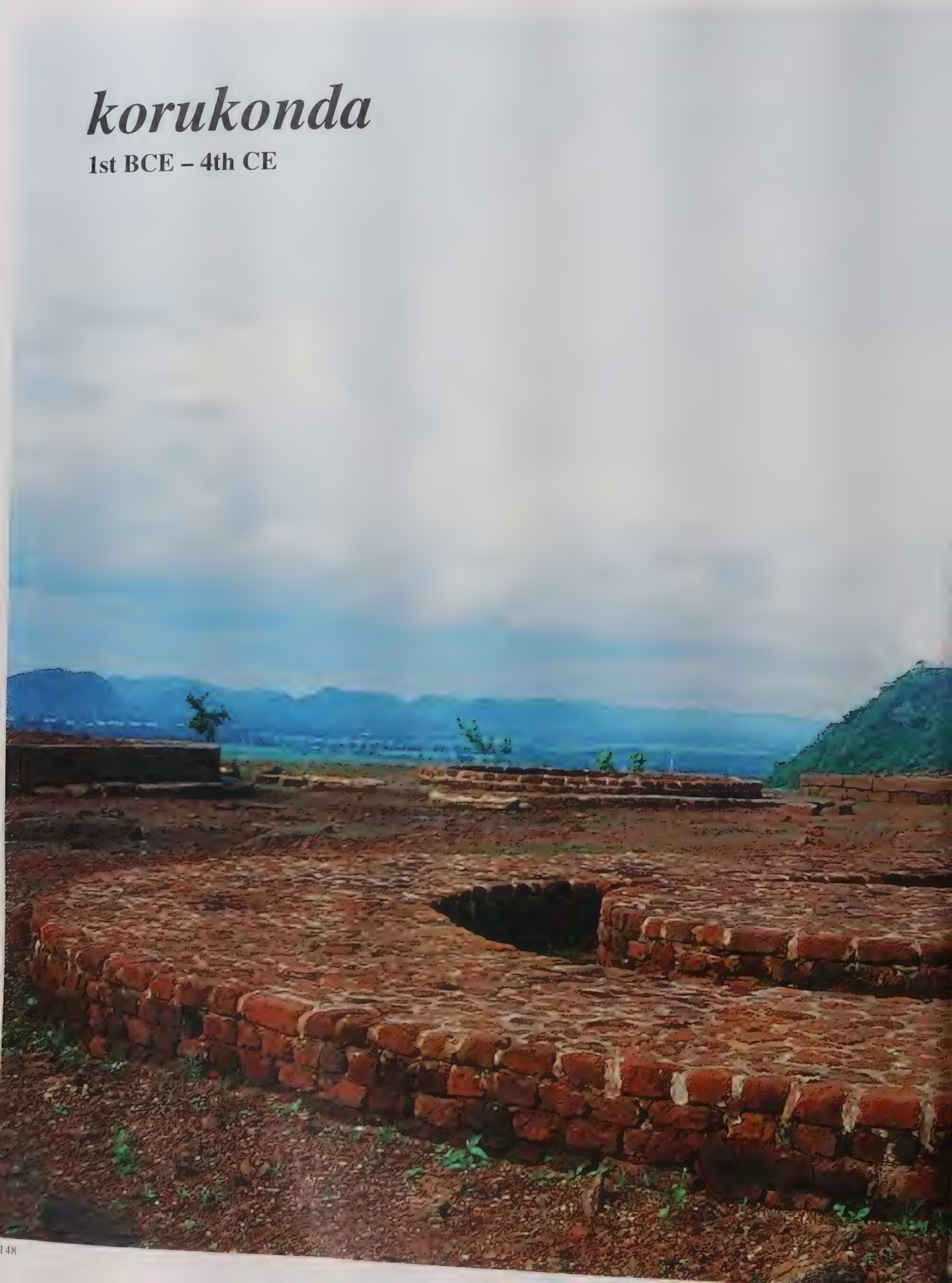
On the summit of the hill are two lofty Stupas entirely cut from rock along with remnants perhaps of a brick structure for which there is no other traces. The western slope that is less steep had been used to carve three huge cells each has a votive Stupa at the centre.



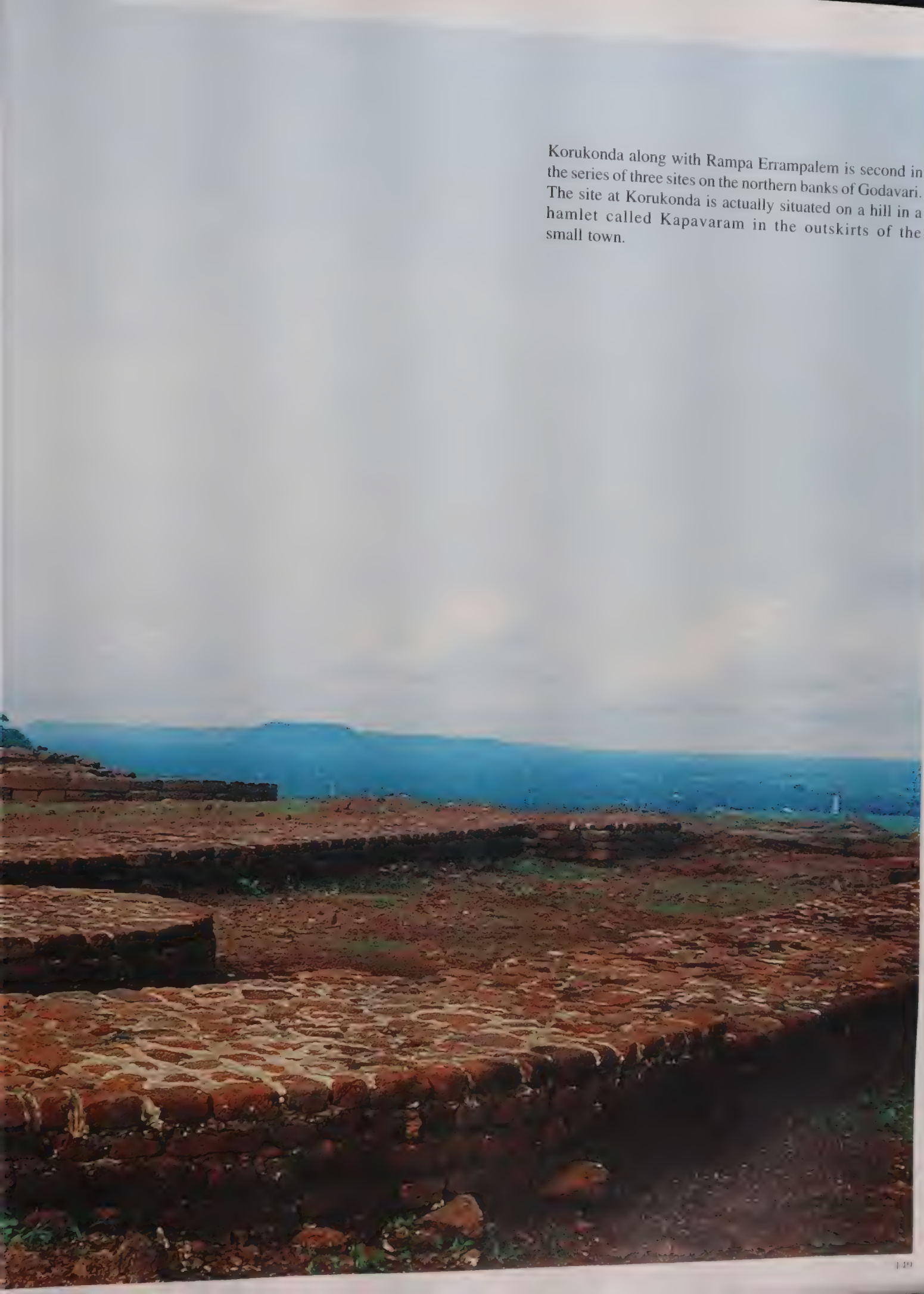
The entire area is at the gateway of dense forests. The forests would have also covered the present village at the time the monastery was habituated by monks. A long canal is being constructed to carry the waters of the River Godavari to Vishakapatam some 200 kilometres north from Rampa Errampalem. To the left of the rock-cut cells there is a low natural cavern that was also probably used as living space. At the eastern slope is a single cell without any votive structure connected with a flight of steps. There is also a sizeable rock cut cistern to store water.

# *korukonda*

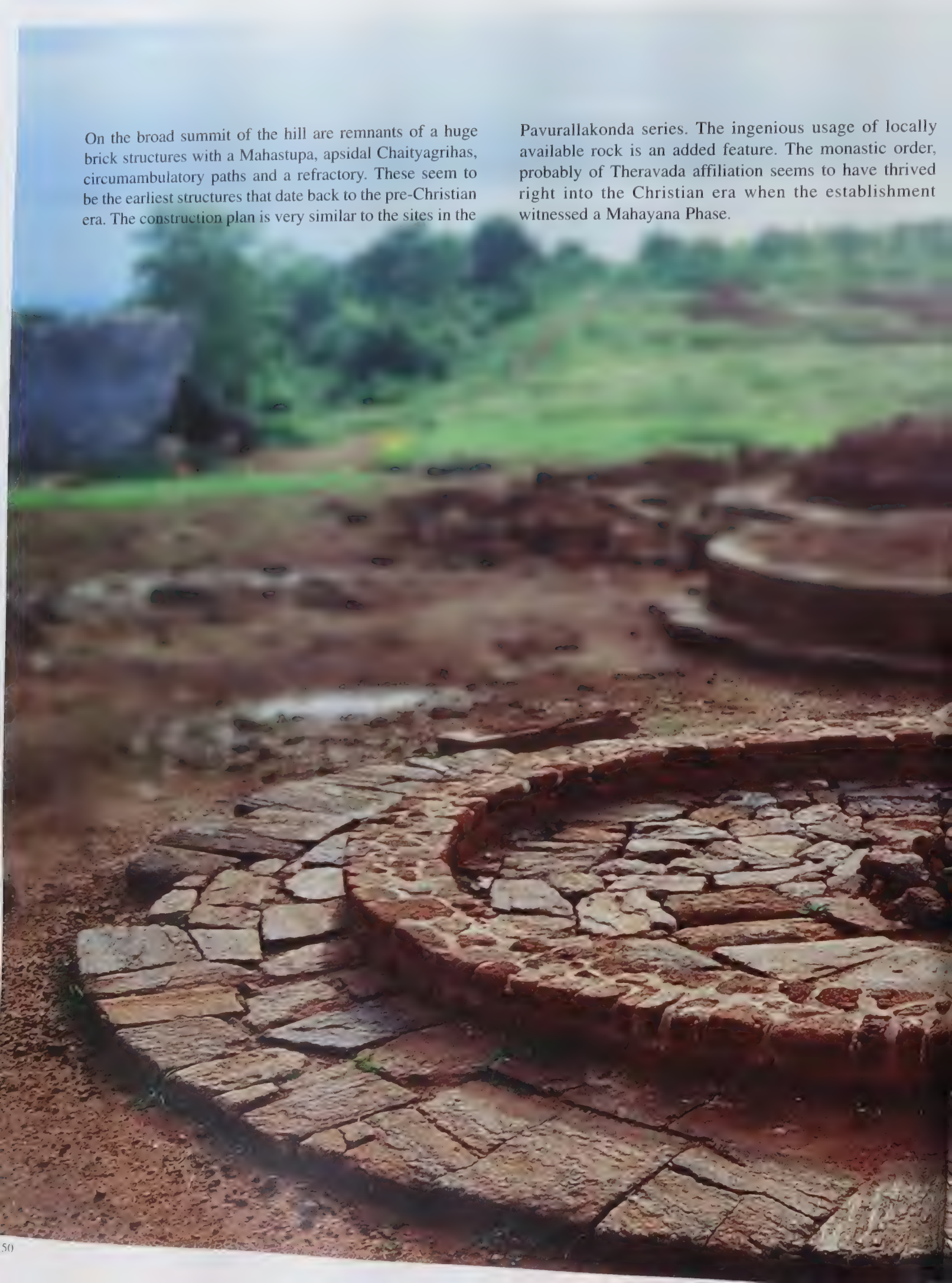
**1st BCE – 4th CE**



Korukonda along with Rampa Errampalem is second in the series of three sites on the northern banks of Godavari. The site at Korukonda is actually situated on a hill in a hamlet called Kapavaram in the outskirts of the small town.



On the broad summit of the hill are remnants of a huge brick structures with a Mahastupa, apsidal Chaityagrihas, circumambulatory paths and a refractory. These seem to be the earliest structures that date back to the pre-Christian era. The construction plan is very similar to the sites in the Pavurallakonda series. The ingenious usage of locally available rock is an added feature. The monastic order, probably of Theravada affiliation seems to have thrived right into the Christian era when the establishment witnessed a Mahayana Phase.

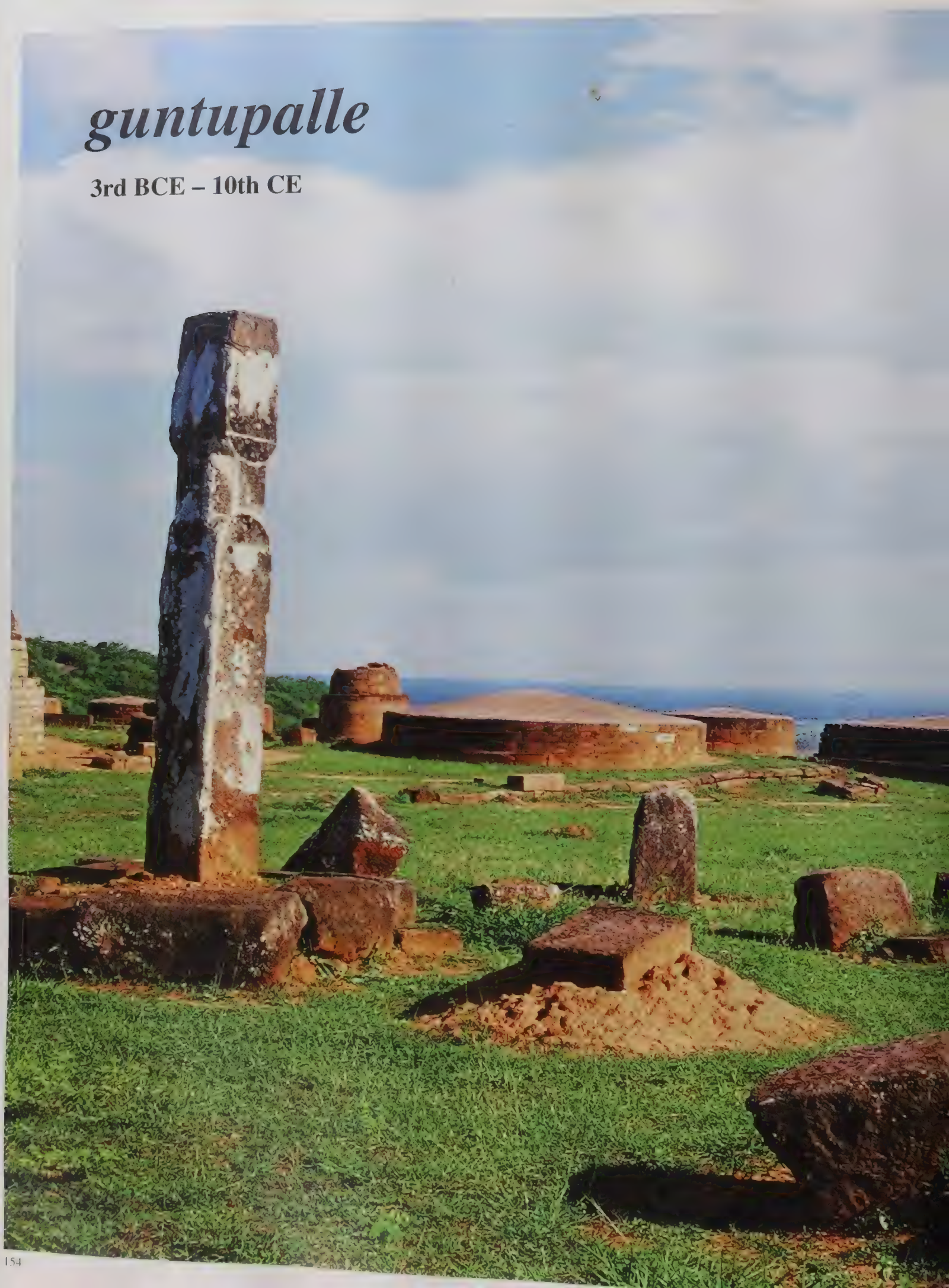


The rock cut Vihara complex could be dated to the 2nd century CE. By far, these are newest additions to the other rock-cut cave complexs, very rare in coastal Andhra. In all there are seven huge cells with a common corridor that is connected to the summit of hill through stairs chiselled from rock. The name Korukonda or Carved Hill may have been after these rock-cut caves. But it is more famous for its Lakshminarasimha shrine also built on the summit of a neighbouring hill.

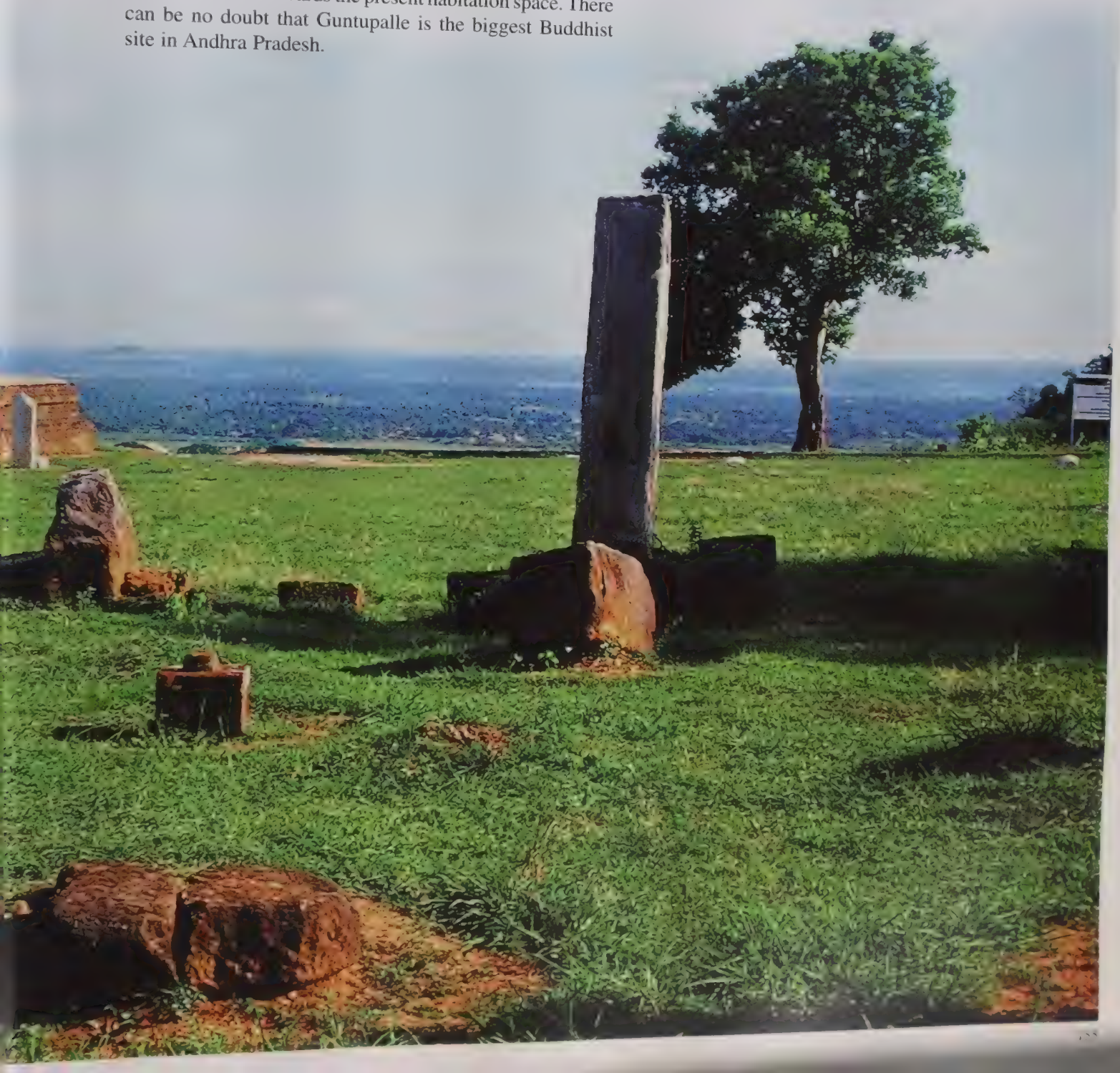
One important find at Korukonda is a fine carved image of Hariti belonging to the 4th century CE. Korukonda and its surrounding areas are famous for its sculpture idiom that is not very well known.

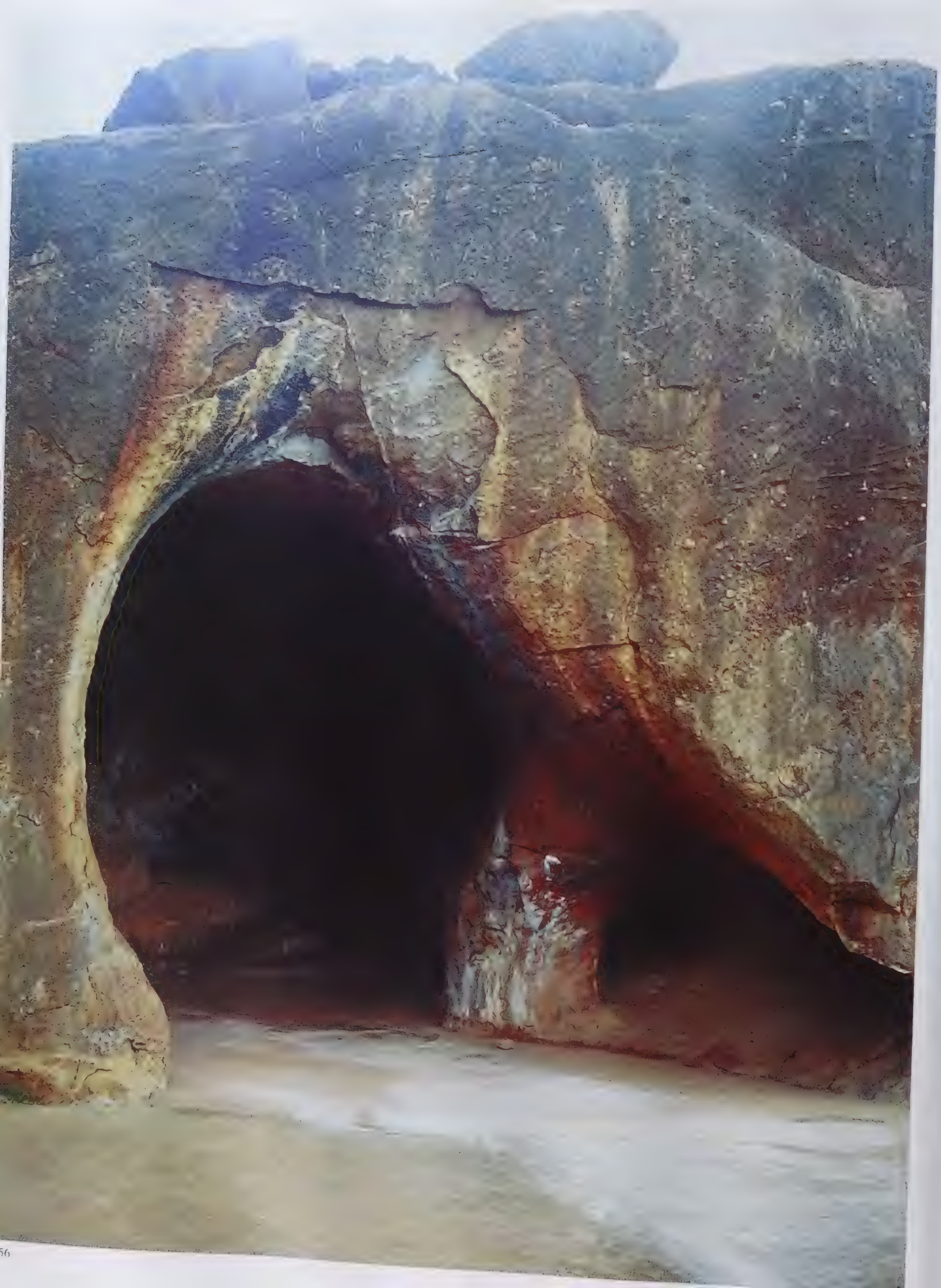
# *guntupalle*

**3rd BCE – 10th CE**



Guntupalle is a village situated 45 kilometers north from Eluru in the West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. The monastic establishment is situated on a picturesque horseshoe shaped hill overlooking a ravine. It contains sprawling Buddhist remains both rock-cut and structural. They include a rock-cut circular Chaityagriha, fourteen rock-cut Viharas, votive Stupas, brick structures, inscribed pillars and material culture that has so far been exhumed covering a period of 1300 years through all the phases of Buddhism. It was first discovered in the late quarter of the 19th century and was excavated for the first time in 1909 by Longhurst. The remains are spread of three huge hill and the foothills towards the present habitation space. There can be no doubt that Guntupalle is the biggest Buddhist site in Andhra Pradesh.

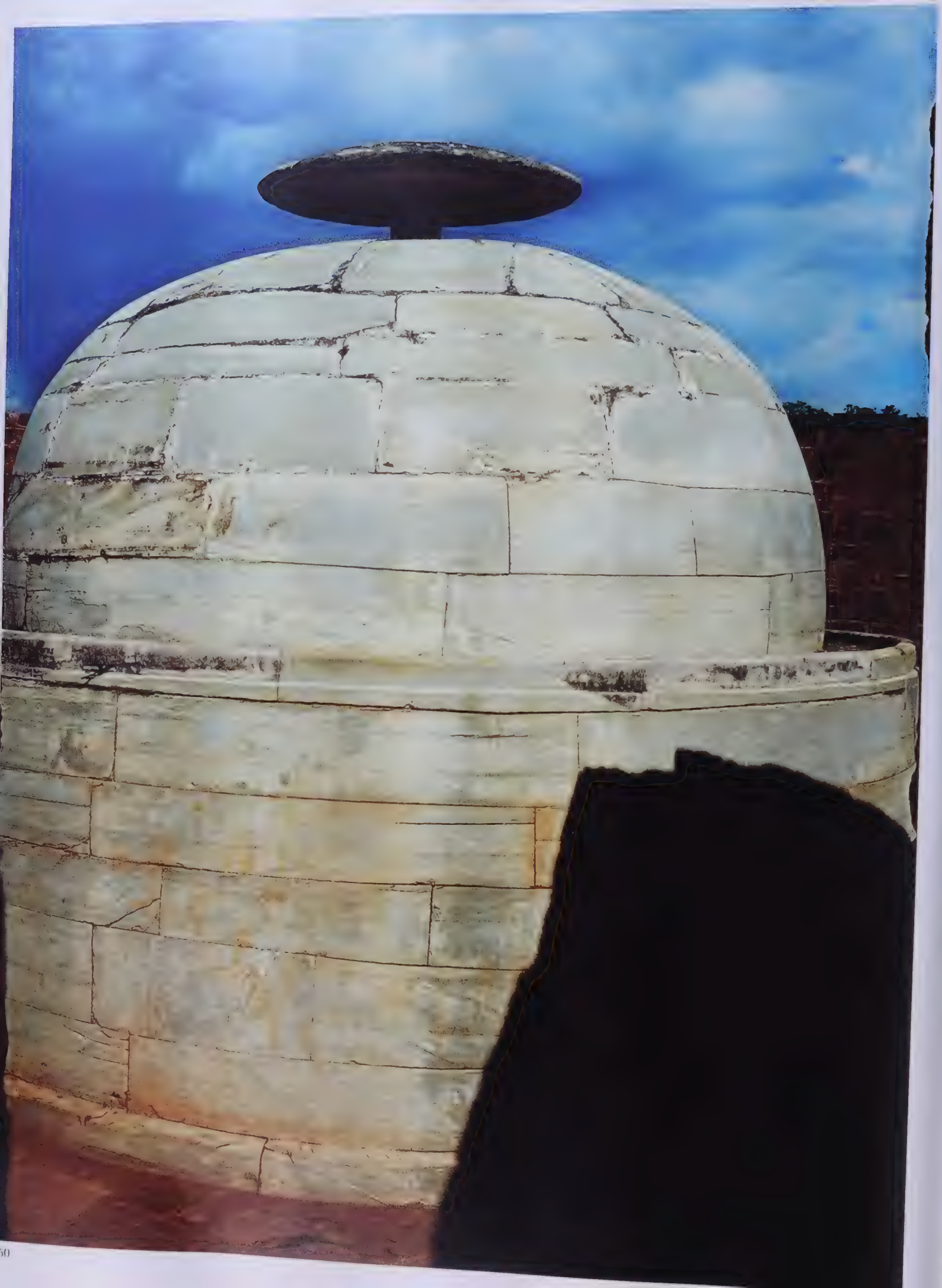




At the entrance to the hill on the right is a huge natural cavern running into the core of the hill. It appears that the cavern was enlarged in the front to provide space along with a portico and stairs leading down. This natural cavern was probably the first layer of occupation much before the first brick structures came up on the hill. The first rock cut caves could have also belonged much later period sometime between the 1st and 2nd CE.

The earliest brick structures have not survived but among the up gradations in the later period are a brick Stupa and a number of drum shaped Chaityas just outside the premises of a ruined congregation hall that only has some of its pillars intact.

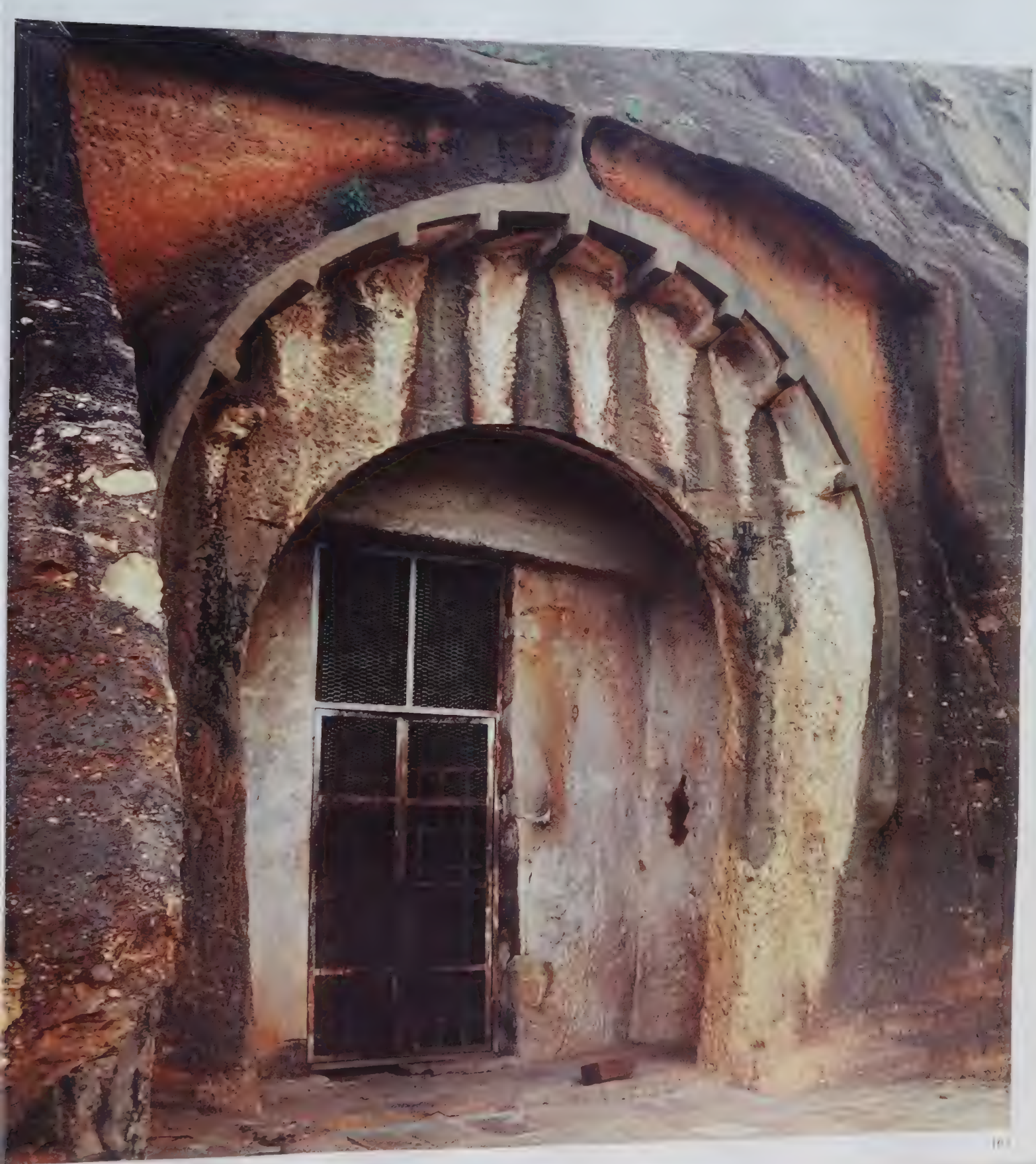
The flat summit of the main hill at Guntupalle overlooks a huge valley connecting the district of West Godavari to the lower Krishna Valley. To the north of the ravines are ancient trade routes that passed from Vengipura, some twelve kilometres south of the monastery, towards the western Deccan. The conspicuous location of the hill and the monastery on it speak volumes about its importance in the historic phases since the earliest habitation by Buddhist monks.



One of the earliest stone structured Stupa in ancient Andhra is to be found at Guntupalle. The Stupa is phased with stone blocks enclosing a core of earth and rubble. The stone blocks were neatly cut to be accurately fitted in a regular coursed masonry without using mortar. The outer surface of the stone blocks is wedged to give a smooth surface. The structure is hemispherical complete with a Harmika and Chattra that were long dislodged even before its first discovery. The Stupa has a key head shaped brick structure with a circumambulatory path. Longhurst has assigned a date "well before 250 BCE" to the construction.

A slab inscription dated to the last century of the pre-Christian era speaks about the construction of a congregation hall by a certain king called Siri Sada who was the scion of Mahameghavahana, probably the conqueror Kharavela. The exact significance of the inscription is still open debate.

Among the earliest rock carving on the main hill is a huge Stupa with a barrel-vaulted dome carved circularly. It resembles woodwork with sixteen carved ribs meeting at an apical centre at the core of the dome. The Stupa, which the locals refer to as the Dharmalinga Kshetra has been converted into a shrine for Siva. Prior to the discovery and subsequent excavation the Stupa and the site were part of the estate of a local Kshtriya family, who were representatives of Kakatiyas in medieval times.

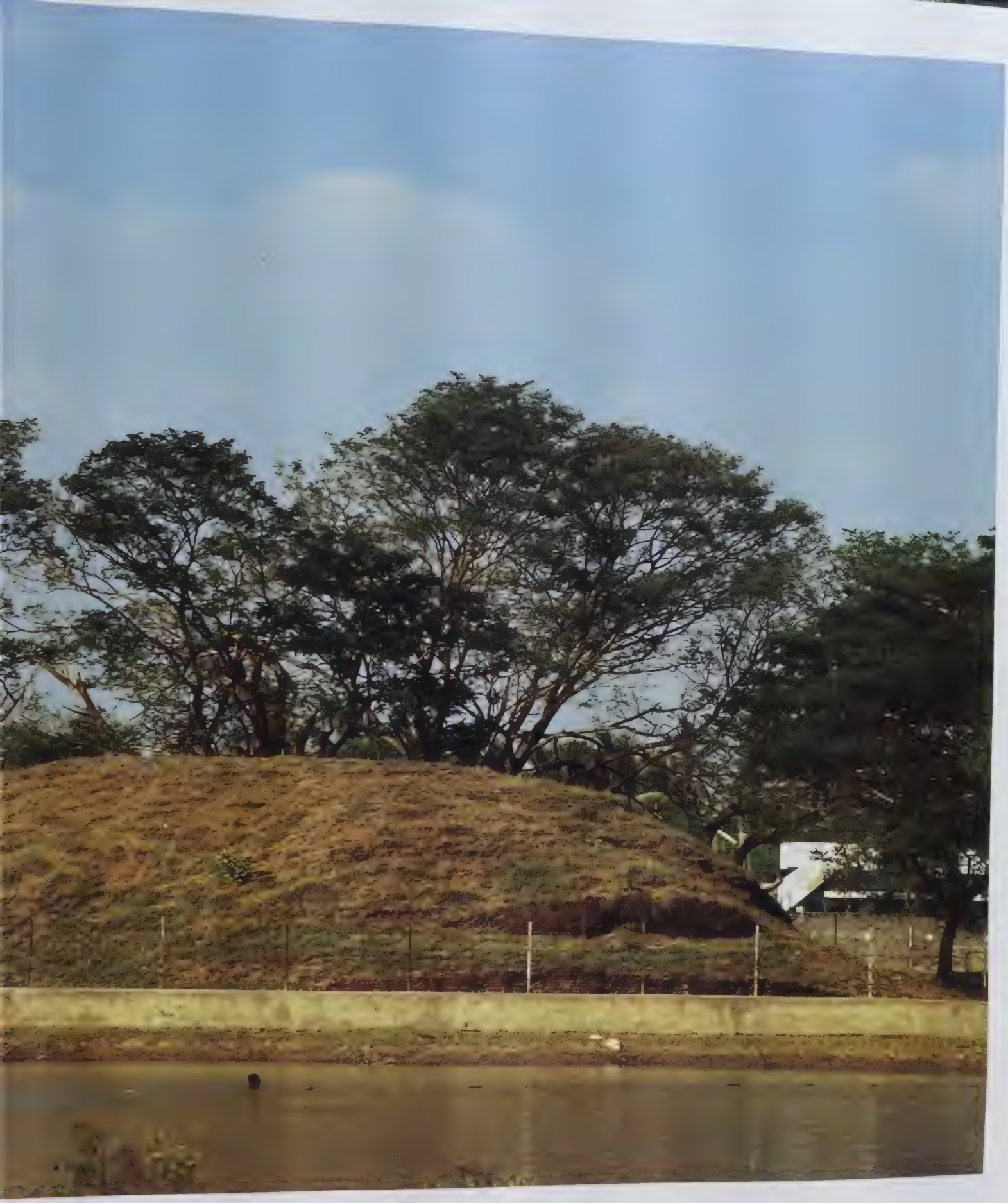


In recent times a series of three rock-cut Viharas were excavated in the neighbouring hills. Although it would be difficult to give them an exact date they seem to belong to the early medieval period on architectural grounds. The monastery had to be extended with the lack of space on the main hill. The rock is of a soft sand stone variety that was unable to stand time chipping away the architectural embellishments. The village of Guntupalle on the foothill of the monastery is littered with Buddhist remnants that need through excavation.

bhattiprolu
3rd BCE – 1st CE

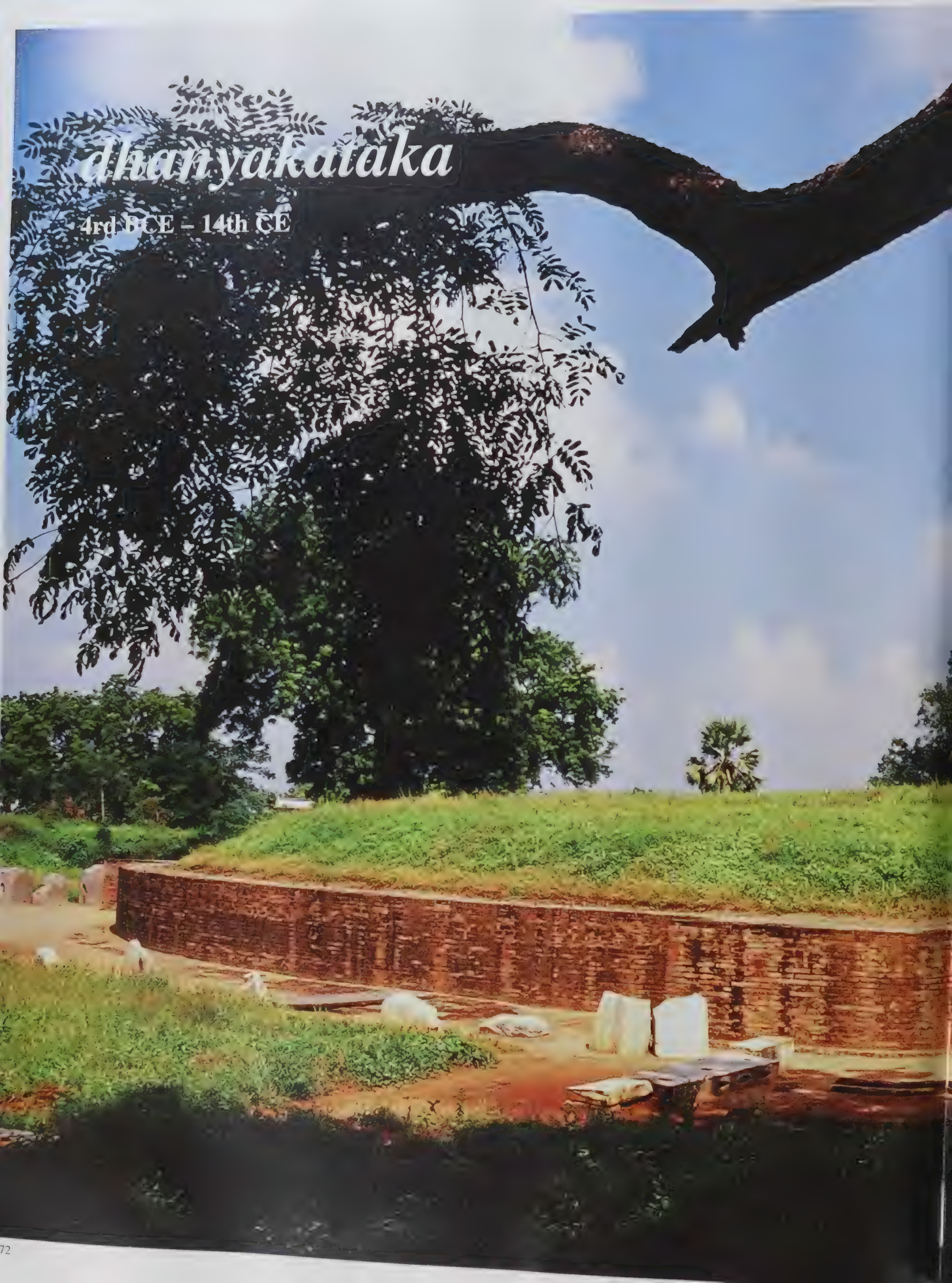
Bhattiprolu is a small village towards the coast in the Guntur district. It is home to one of the most ancient Buddhist monuments in Andhra. Sadly, nothing of the free standing Stupas survived except for a huge mound that was one the site of a spectacular Stupa and monastic establishment. In 1870 the collector of Krishna district that included Guntur in those days, commissioned a contingent of workers to excavate Bhattiprolu and found burnt bricks with odd measurements that still had not known of wedges along with remnants of limestone panels with archaic carvings.

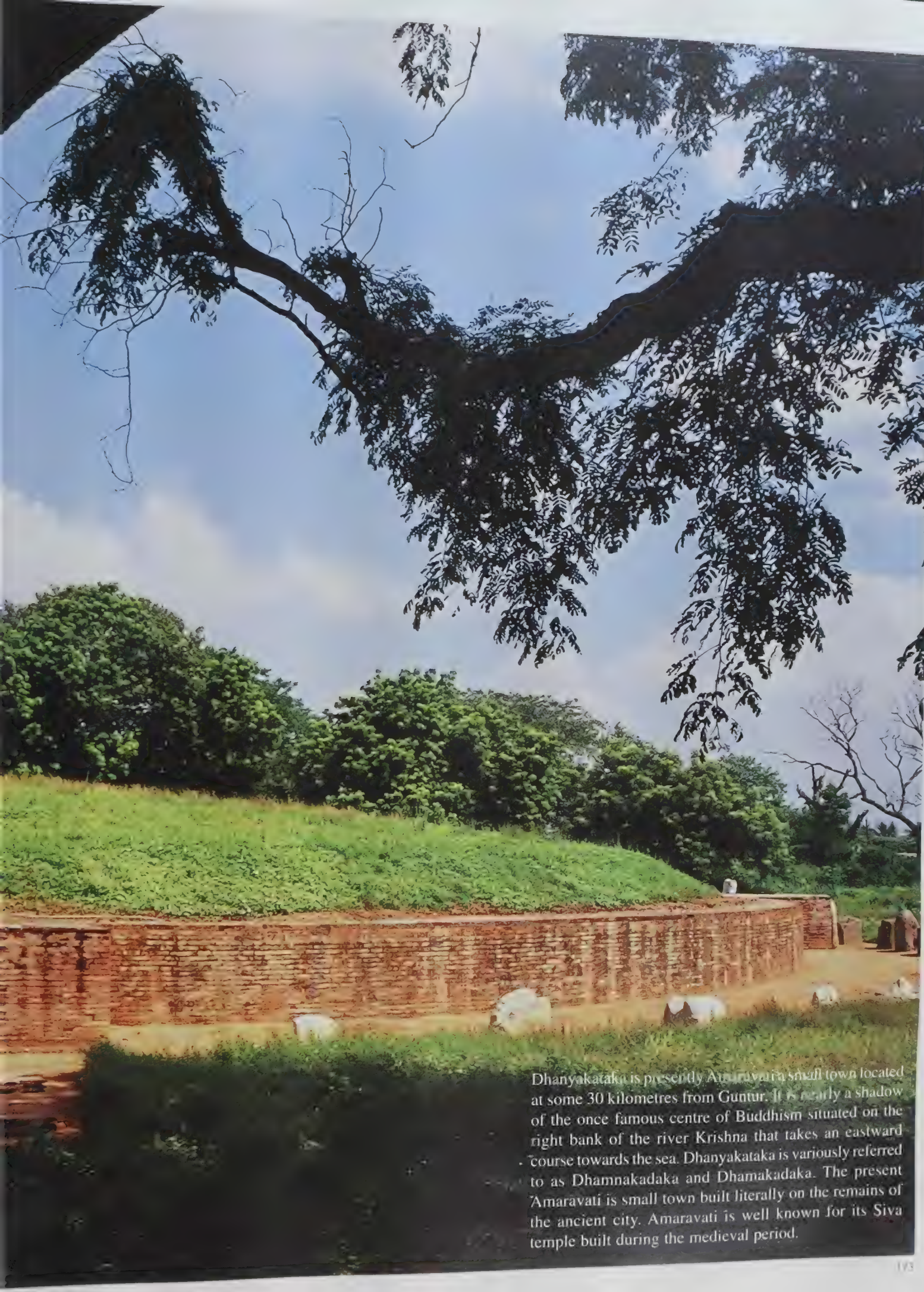
Bhattiprolu had three huge mounds at the time of their discovery.But only one remained by the time excavations were done under Robert Sewell in the 1880's. The other two were plundered for the bricks and rumoured gold. The reason for the 'gold hunt' was the discovery of a relic casket with a gold leaf and a few pearls along with inscriptions in an archaic Brahmi, subsequently deciphered. The inscriptions are the oldest testimony of writing in south India.Six examples of writing were discovered in form of relic caskets.The inscriptions give lists of donors and merchants who probably patronised the monastery. Among them is the name of a king Kubhiraka.Although there is near unanimity in placing the language of the inscriptions as a southern form of Brahmi and since there is no other extant example of such writing anywhere else the date is disputed. Most scholars haved reasoned their arguments to say that the inscriptions could not have been later then the 3rd century before the Christian era.



In 1892 Alexander Rea carried out excavations at the Stupa, built of brick. Each brick measured 2' x 1' 6" x 4". The Stupa had a dome of 132' feet in diameter, stood over a drum of 148' feet in diameter. The height of the drum was 8' feet and on all the four cardinal dictions were Ayaka platforms and pillars. Around the base of the drum, there was circumambulatory paved with brick. Along its edge was a lime stone railing. The drum was veneered with carved limestone slabs dome was about 65 feet in height. Six fragments of the uprights of the railing and the two pieces of a stone umbrella, ribbed inside, were the other finds at the site.

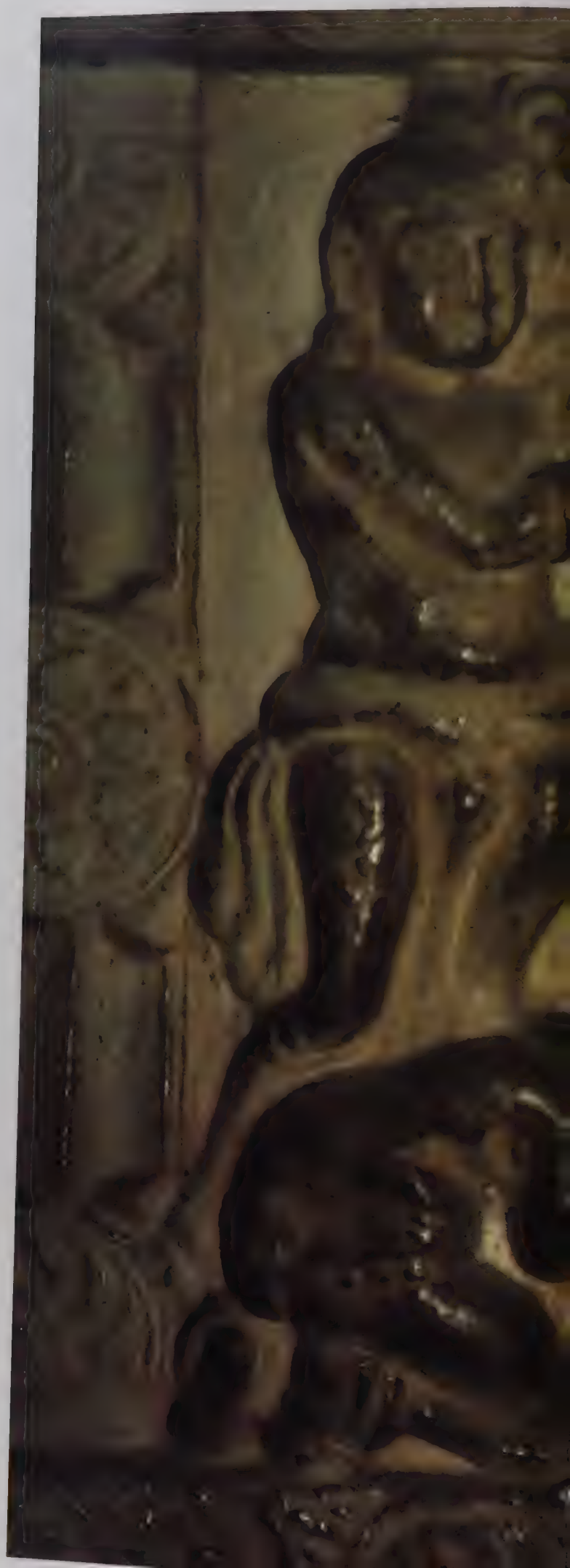
Most of the marble sculpted slabs found at Bhattiprolu were used in building roads, culverts and in one famous case, roof and walls of a make shift lavatory for women in a troupe of performers. The site itself was not conserved properly. A tank was dug in the 1920's to facilitate the washing of the entire village's dirty linen.


dhanyakataka
4rd BCE – 14th CE



Dhanyakataka is presently Amaravati a small town located at some 30 kilometres from Guntur. It is nearly a shadow of the once famous centre of Buddhism situated on the right bank of the river Krishna that takes an eastward course towards the sea. Dhanyakataka is variously referred to as Dhamnakadaka and Dhamakadaka. The present Amaravati is small town built literally on the remains of the ancient city. Amaravati is well known for its Siva temple built during the medieval period.

The earliest layer of culture at Dhanyakataka has until recently been put at the 3rd century BCE. But a pre-Mauryan phase was excavated during the late 1980s that revealed Black and Red ware and Northern Black Polished Ware of pre-Mauryan affinity. The earliest layers have structures built on bricks that were different from the size used later. A Stupa of considerable size was revealed belonging to that phase which is presently being placed at the quarter of the 4th century BCE. The present Mahastupa seems to have been enlarged and upgraded during the Mauryan era on the base of the older one. The first phase dates back to the 4th century to the 2nd century BCE. The second stage begins with the Mauryan era constructions and third stage during the first quarter of the Christian era. The final phase ends by the 2nd century AD.



Colin Mackenzie who was the director of the topographical survey of India first discovered Dhanyakataka in 1797. After initial surveys comprehensive excavations were conducted and many unknown facts of Dhanyakataka were laid bare. Mackenzie resurveyed the site in 1816 this time along with nine British draughtsmen and three natives. They stayed there for about five months in and made thousand of drawings of the site and the antiquaries found at Dhanyakataka. It remains the most excavated Buddhist site in Andhra Pradesh, where archaeologists were unravelling its past even in the late 1980's. The Mahastupa at Dhanyakataka seemed to have been a low hemispherical mound similar to the Stupa at Sanchi, with a dome raised up on a drum-like platform, evidently devised to enhance the loftiness and grandeur of the structure that would otherwise appear to be of little architectural merit, an imposing structure commanding the landscape.

# *velagiri*

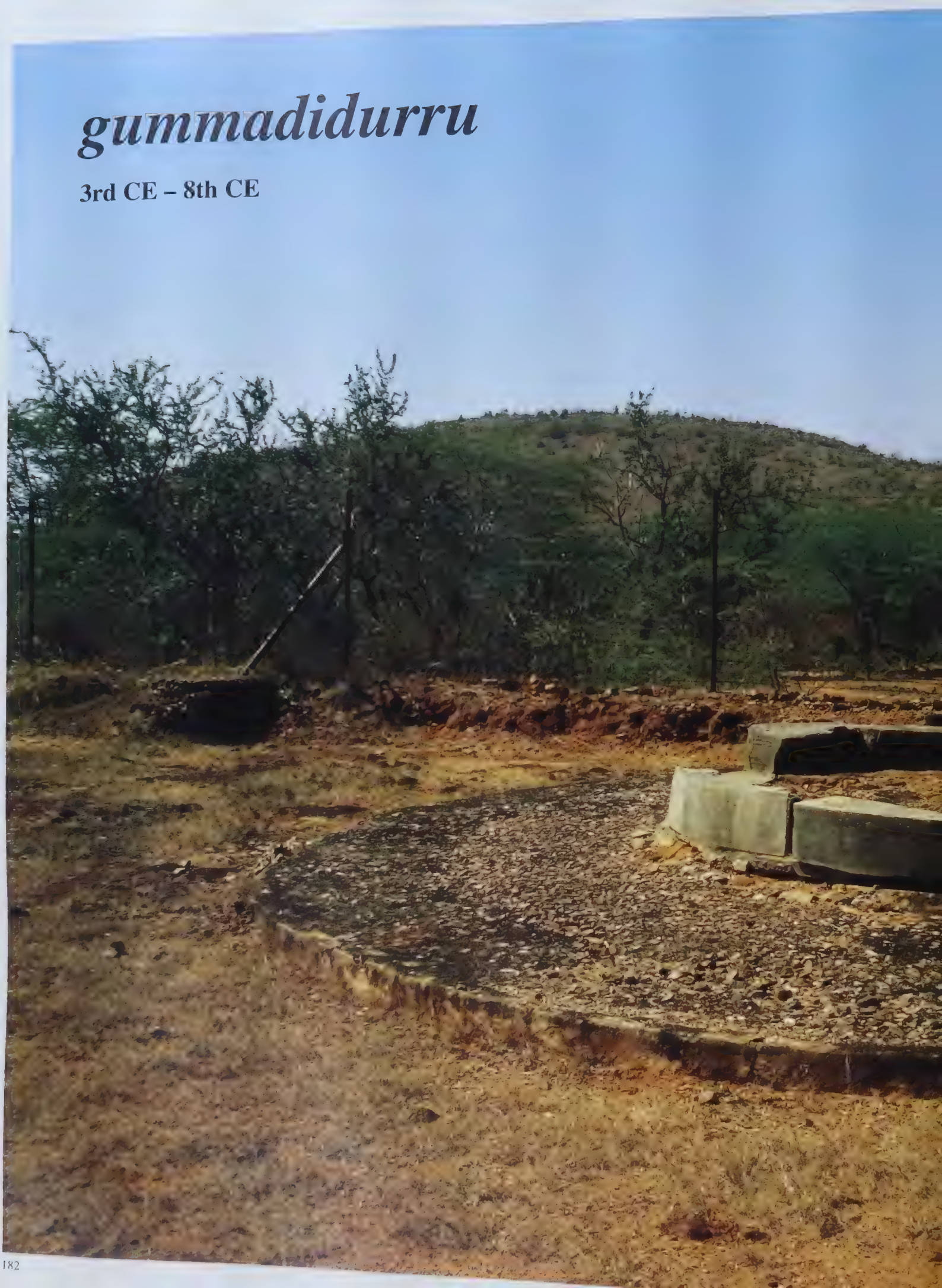
**2nd BCE – 7th CE**

Velagiri or the modern town of Jaggayyapeta is at confluence of the Krishna and Paler 75 kilometres from Vijayawada and 48 kilometres north of Dhanyakataka. Some distance away from the town of Jaggayyapeta lies a low hill is locally known as Dhanambodu or the mound of wealth. The name Jaggayyapeta was given by the feudal lord Vasireddy Venkatadri Naidu in honour of his father. The sleepy town was in the medieval times called Betavolu. The locals in search of gold have vandalized much of the site. Velagiri in the early historic period had a huge dome 63 feet in diameter and 39 feet in height with Ayaka pillars in the four cardinal directions.

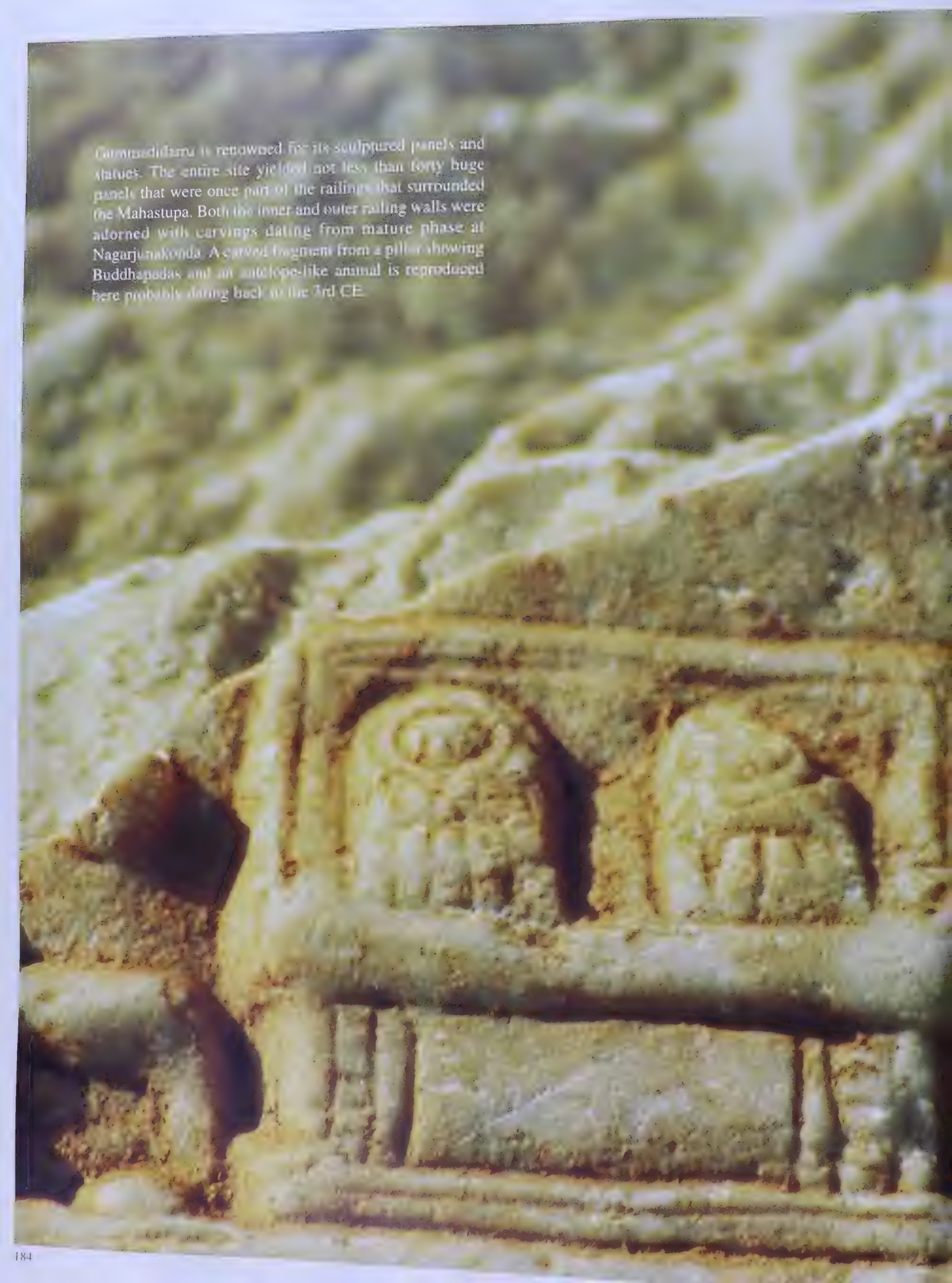
The railings had beautiful sculpture like at Dhanyakataka and Nagarjunakonda. It was home to some of the earliest sculptural panels contemporaneous with the first phase at Dhanyakataka. With the exceptions of with a few limestone slabs having those early carvings the rest were destroyed by Venkatradri Naidu, who used these sculptured slabs to reinforce the flooring of his home by pounding the limestone. The Irish archaeologist Jas Burgess was witness to desecration. Shocked, Burgess immediately wrote to the authorities to shift the existing slabs to a safe place. In 1884 the sculptured slabs from the ancient Velagiri were shipped to London from where they found their way to New York and Boston.

# *gummadidurru*

**3rd CE – 8th CE**



Gummadidarru is a village some 10 kilometres east of the Velagiri site. On a low hill at the entrance of the village lies the monastic establishment with a Mahastupa, Chaityas, inscribed pillars and immense sculptural wealth that is deposited in the government museum at Chennai. What lies in Gummadidarru at present foundation remains of the once glorious structure. The monastery was in existence to a late period in the early medieval times. Inscribed clay tablets with Telugu characters were found during the excavations.



Gummadidurru is renowned for its sculptured panels and statues. The entire site yielded not less than forty huge panels that were once part of the railings that surrounded the Mahastupa. Both the inner and outer railing walls were adorned with carvings dating from mature phase at Nagarjunakonda. A carved fragment from a pillar showing Buddhapadas and an antelope-like animal is reproduced here probably dating back to the 3rd CE.

# *nelakondapalli*

**2nd BCE – 4th CE**

Nelakondapalli is 20 kilometres from Khammam on the road towards Aswaraopeta, which is also a Buddhist site. Nelakondapalli is popular as the birthplace of the Telugu saint-poet Kancherla Gopanna known as Ramadasu. On the outskirts of the village lies Viratarajudibba bordered by an ancient mud fortification wall dating back to the pre-Christian era. Very close to it lays the monastic complex that is locally called Bairagulagutta

It is not known if the present monastic complex was within the periphery of the fortification wall. It seems likely that the monastery was upgraded some time in the early Christian era on the foundation of the older complex. Excavations had revealed a huge brick structure with monastic cells, paths, wells and cisterns apart from material culture that included several stone images and a bronze idol of the Buddha. Among the finds was a miniature votive Stupa that had an inscription Skanda Badarasa or the gift of Skandha Bhadra in 4th CE characters.

# *anupu*

**2nd CE – 5th CE**

In a view to utilize the supposed wastage of Krishna water flowing into the sea and to develop the dry areas of the lower Krishna valley a huge dam was built at Nagarjunakonda in the Palanadu area of the Guntur district some 20 kilometres away from the ancient capital of Ikshvakus. After long years of exploration and excavation the Buddhist antiquaries found at Nagarjunakonda were curated at a museum after the valley was submerged. The best part of the conservation work was the recreation of an ancient university complex at Anupu 8 kilometres from the dam site.

Among the most interesting aspects of the site presently at Anupu is a Roman style amphitheatre with a sitting capacity of at least a thousand people. The amphitheatre was probably used for staging performances of the Jataka tales or for ceremonial readings of Buddhist texts. The amphitheatre was possibly part of a large institution meant for novice monks called the Nissayas along with senior monks who were study aspects of Buddhism.

With the shift of capital from Dhanyakataka to Nagarjunakonda during the Ikshavaku regime or even slightly earlier Buddhism received a fresh impetus from the active patronage from royalty and laity alike. Apart from the beautiful sculpture found at Nagarjunakonda there were also a number of Stupas and Shrine among which is one dedicated to Hariti the Buddhist goddess or later Buddhism.

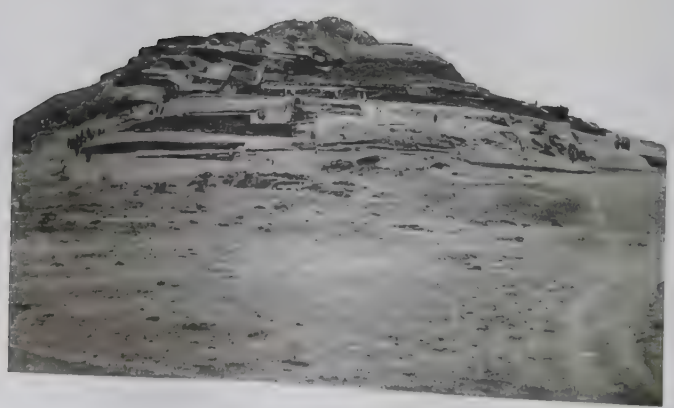
# *singarakonda*

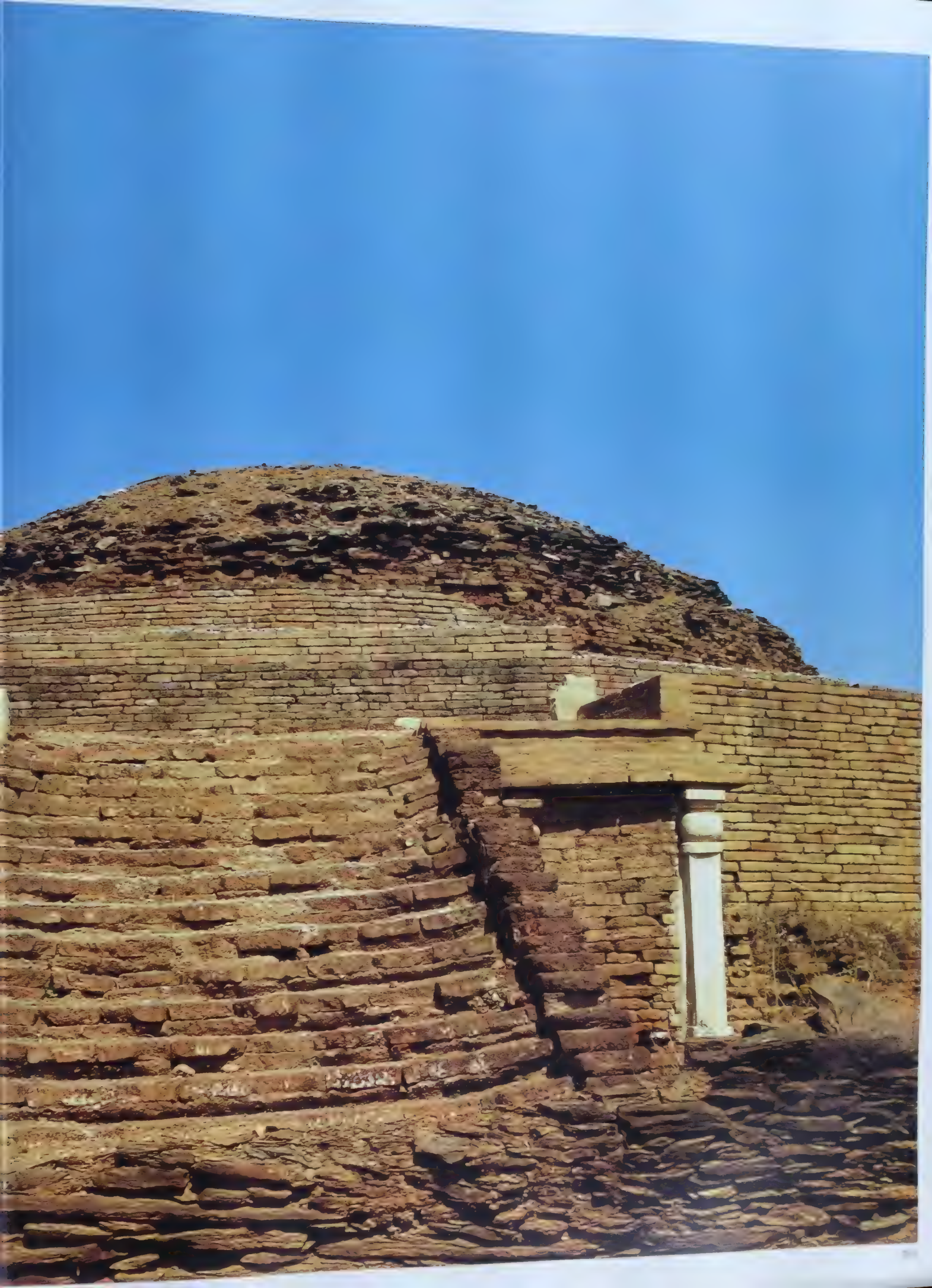
**2nd BCE – 2nd CE**

Chandavaram is a remote village situated on the left bank of the River Gundlakamma flowing through the Vellampalle village on the Kurnool-Guntur highway. On an isolated low hill called Singarakonda, 2 kilometres away from the present village is a Buddhist establishment with terraced platforms, an apsidal Chaityagriha votive Stupas, Drum slabs and nearly forty monastic cells. At the centre is the Mahastupa, a hemispherical dome reinforced with locally available rock. In its heydays the dome seems to have been covered with marble-like limestone sculptured panels. It appears that the monastic complex was a Theravada site and was abandoned in the 2nd century CE.

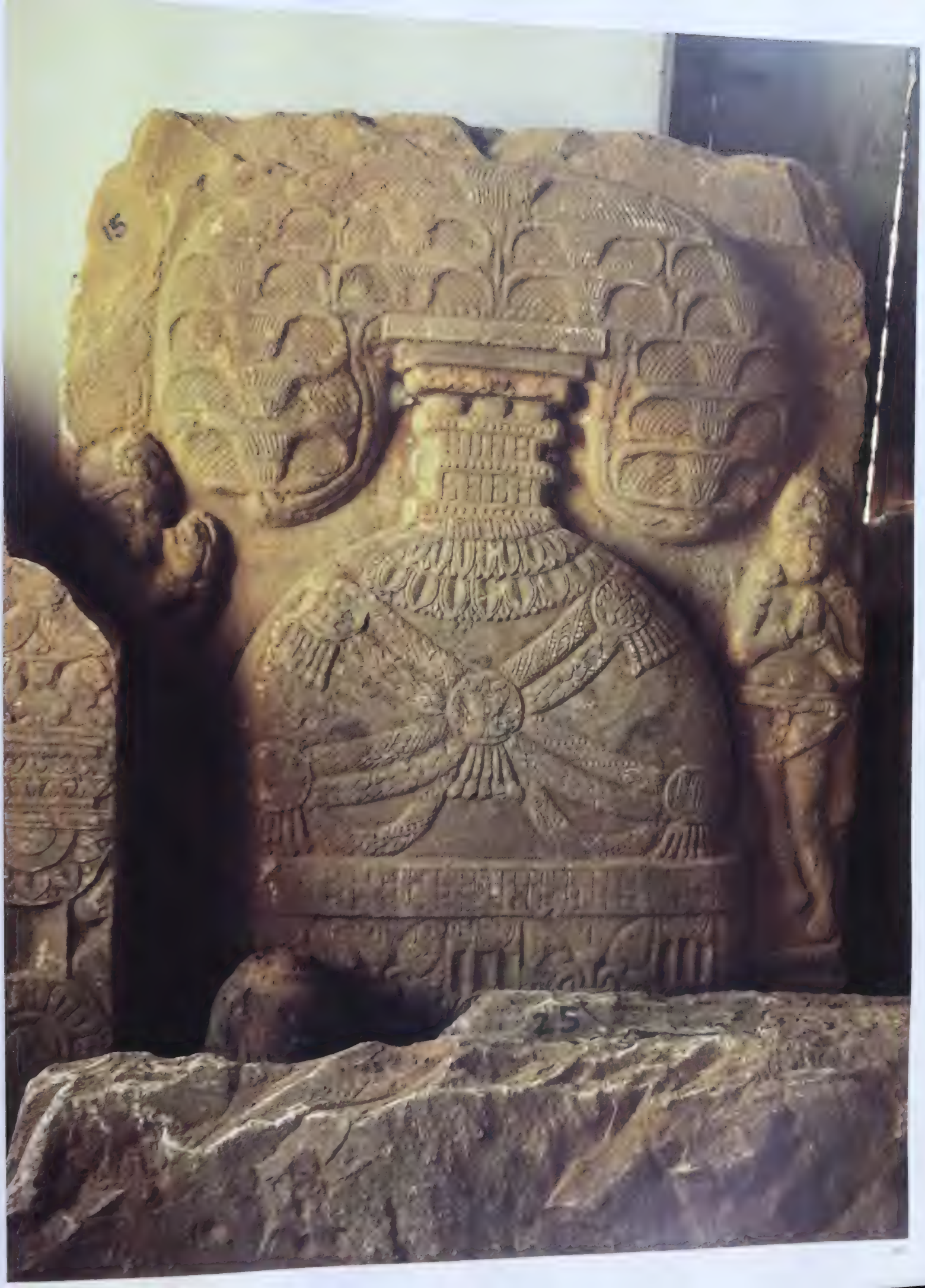
The Gundlakamma is the only source of water in this arid area that sustains on crops like maize, millet and in recent years chilli for its commercial potential. Cotton is also grown in some parts. Rainfall is scarce and drought perennial. There are a number of pre and proto-historic sites right from the upper course of the Gundlakamma. The vicinity of Singarakonda itself has a good proto-historic profile. The laity to the earliest nucleus of the monastery could have been the pastoralists and seasonal farmers inhabiting the area east of the Mahastupa towards Velampalle and Dhupadu on the right bank of the Gundlakamma. The Chandavaram village was inhabited some time after the 5th CE going by inscriptional evidence in the local shrine dedicated to Siva.

Systematic excavations conducted since the early 1970s have revealed a huge quantity of material culture associated with the Stupa. The earliest constructions on the hill have been dated to the 2nd BCE. Construction activity on Singarakonda can roughly be divided in two distinct phases. The Mahastupa could be dated at around the first quarter of the 2nd BCE along with a few cells. Much of the first phase can be deduced only from the brick size that seems to be the standard variety used in the pre-Christian era elsewhere. The second phase is represented by the construction of more cells outer railings and up gradation of the Mahastupa to its present height around the late quarter of the 1st CE. It was also the time when the Stupa was embellished with sculptured panels. The carvings on the panel belong to the second phase of sculpture at Dhanyakataka. A few more panels were probably added sometime later in the first decades of the 2nd CE. One of the panels carries an inscription that could be datable to that period.





Sculptured panels from the abandoned site on Singarakonda had been plundered by the villagers in Chandavaram to lay them as steps to the Siva shrine. The vandalism did not stop at Chandavaram alone. There are a number of villages in the vicinity that have these sculpted panels on wells, in village squares and in one case as a slab to wash clothes. In recent years armed gangs from neighbouring districts attacked the Stupa and parted with entire panels only to return for the remaining.The residents of Chandavaram have voluntarily removed the existing panels from the monastic complex and stacked them in a dingy classroom of a school.The only parts to have survived vandalism are the panels that have depictions of the Naga Muchilinda protecting the Buddhapadas. Almost every village in the vicinity have atleast one such panel placed at a conspicous location to be worshipped as the incaration of Siva.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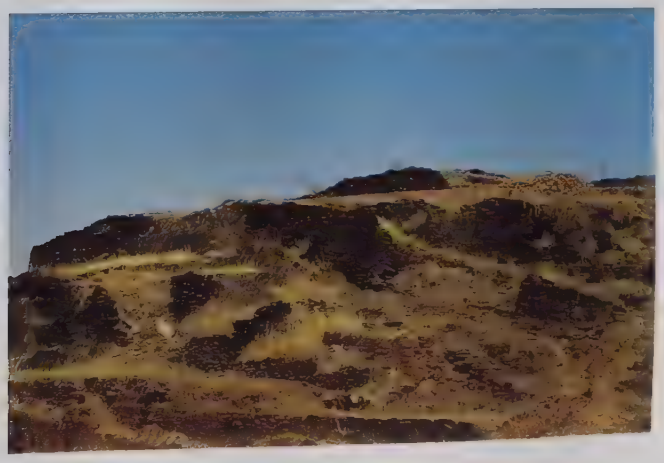
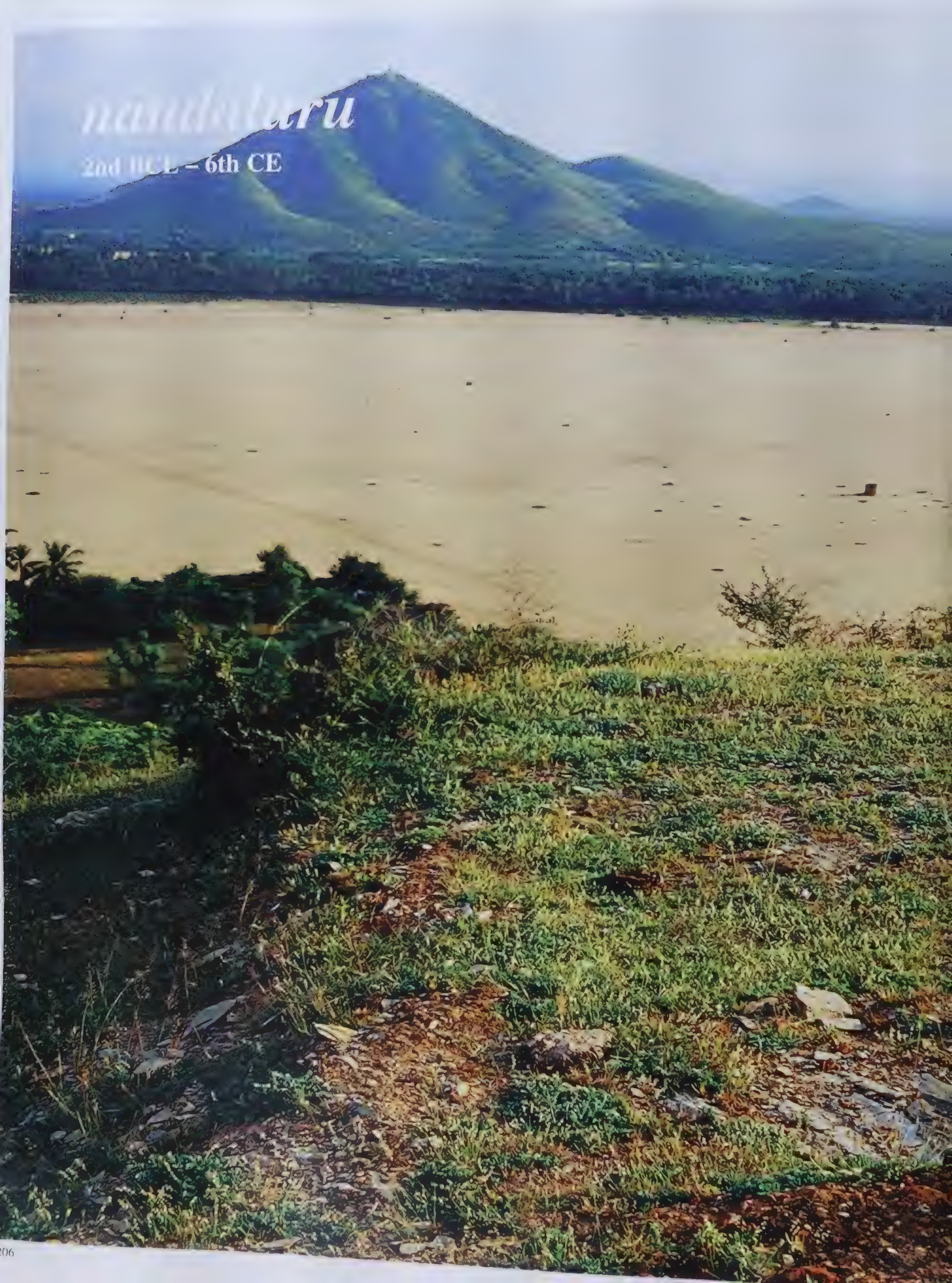
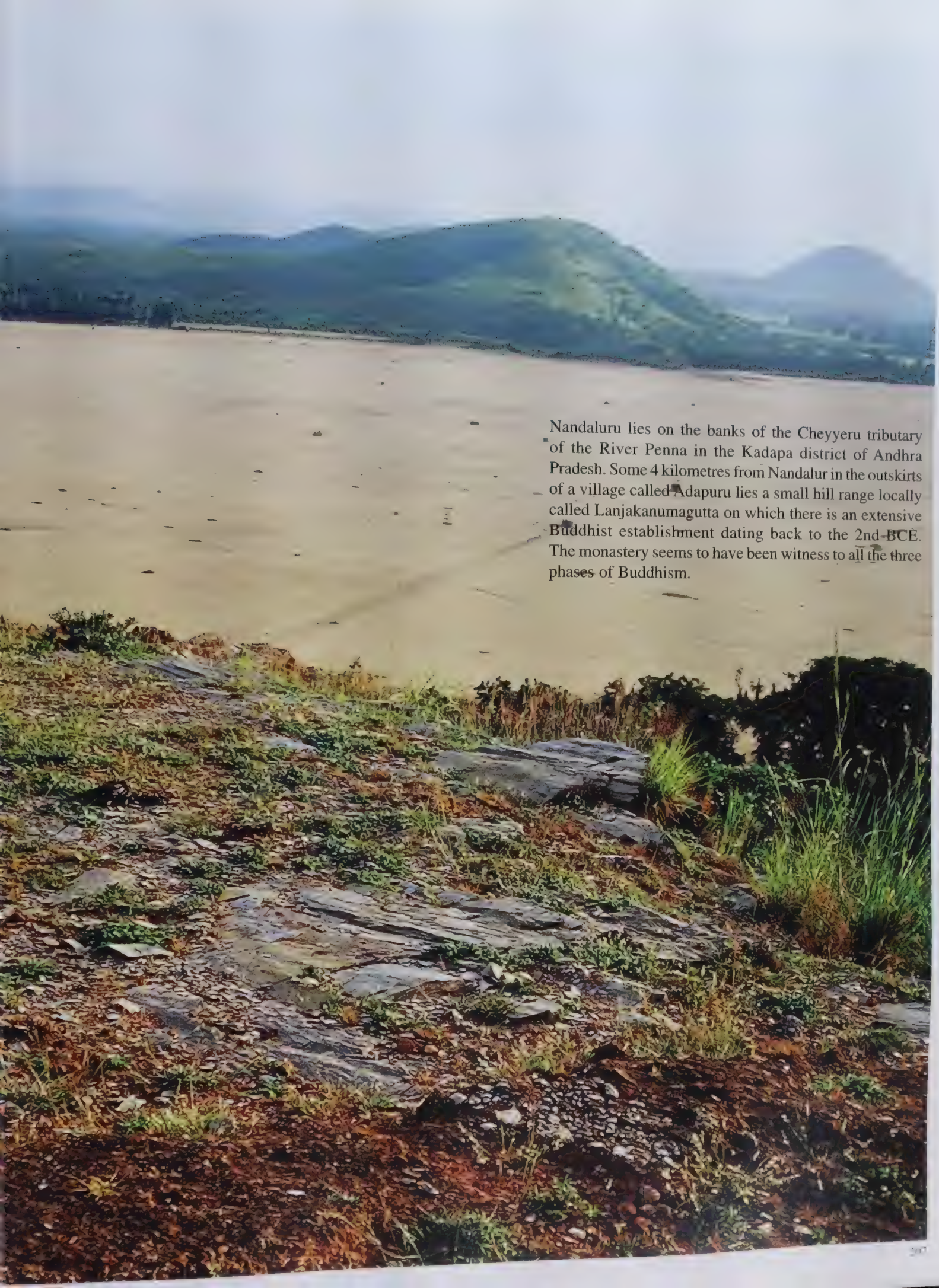
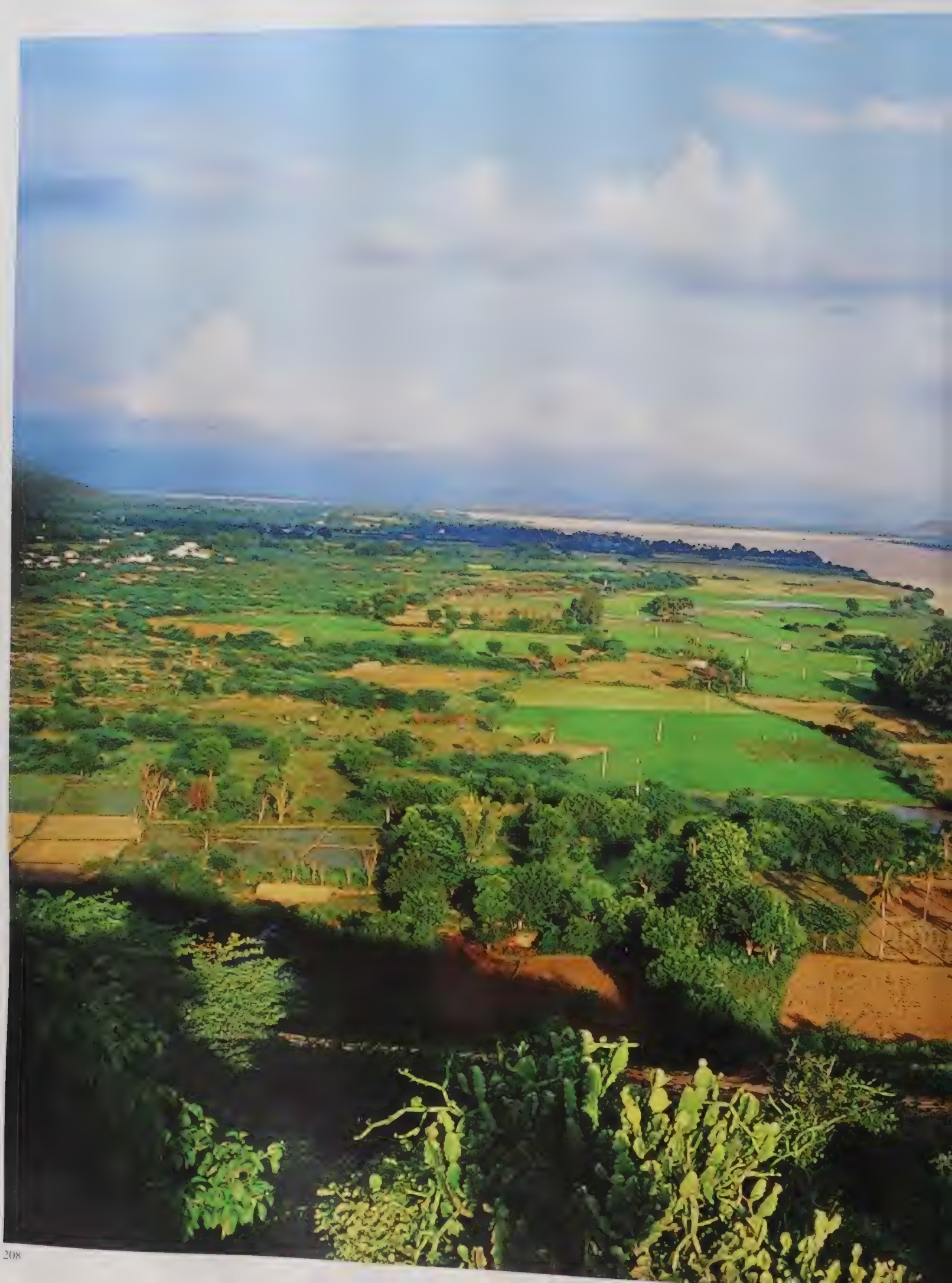
The monastery on Singarakonda was initially successful in gathering a laity around rituals and on the possibilities of trade links that brought in the much-needed iron among other goods. The demise of trade and shift in the ritual pattern coupled probably with a long spell of drought could have lulled the activity on Singarakonda to stage where monks occupying the monastery only as a monsoon retreat and gradually abandoning it.




2nd BCE – 6th CE



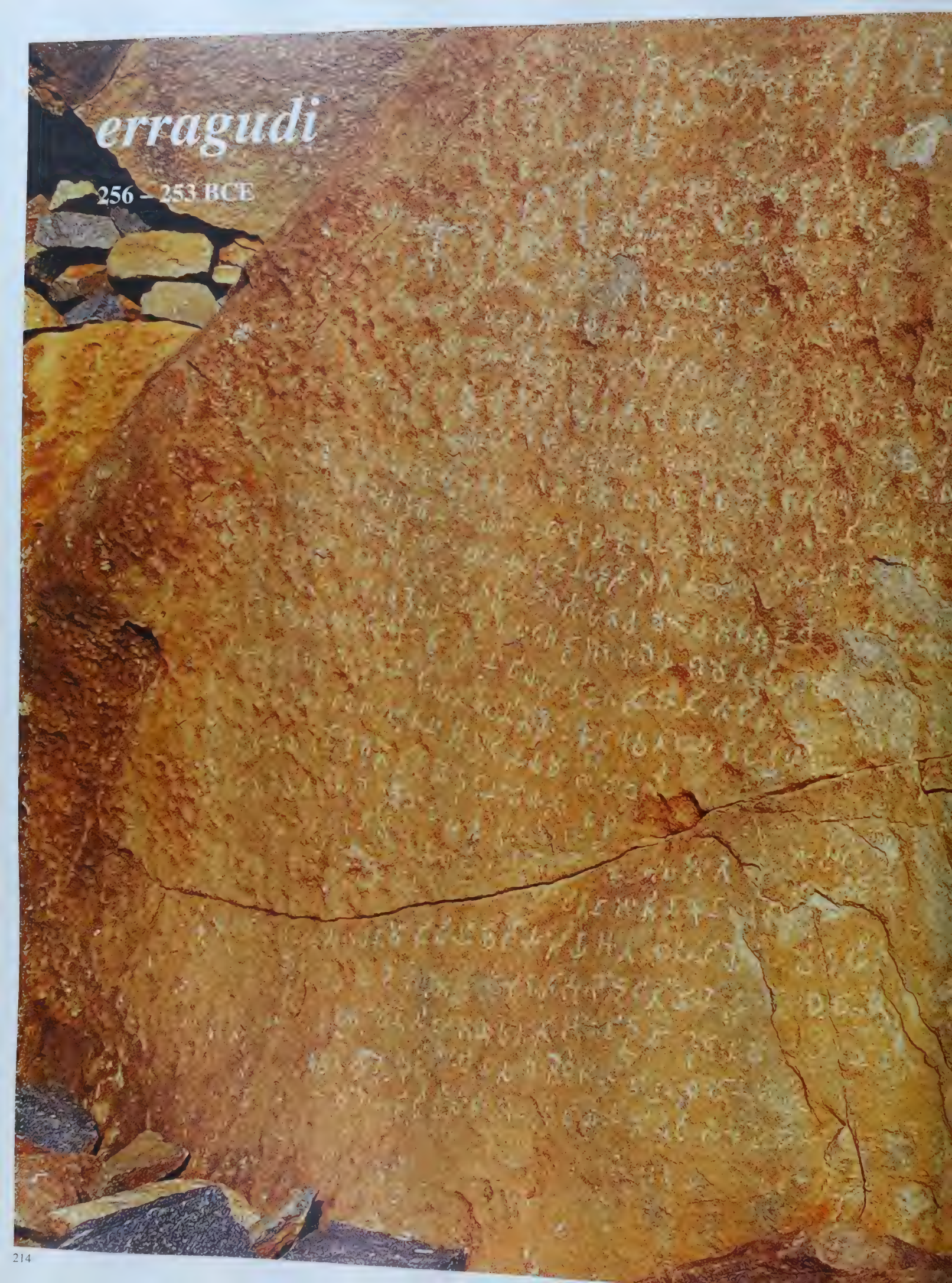
Nandaluru lies on the banks of the Cheyyeru tributary of the River Penna in the Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh. Some 4 kilometres from Nandalur in the outskirts of a village called Adapuru lies a small hill range locally called Lanjakanumagutta on which there is an extensive Buddhist establishment dating back to the 2nd-BCE. The monastery seems to have been witness to all the three phases of Buddhism.



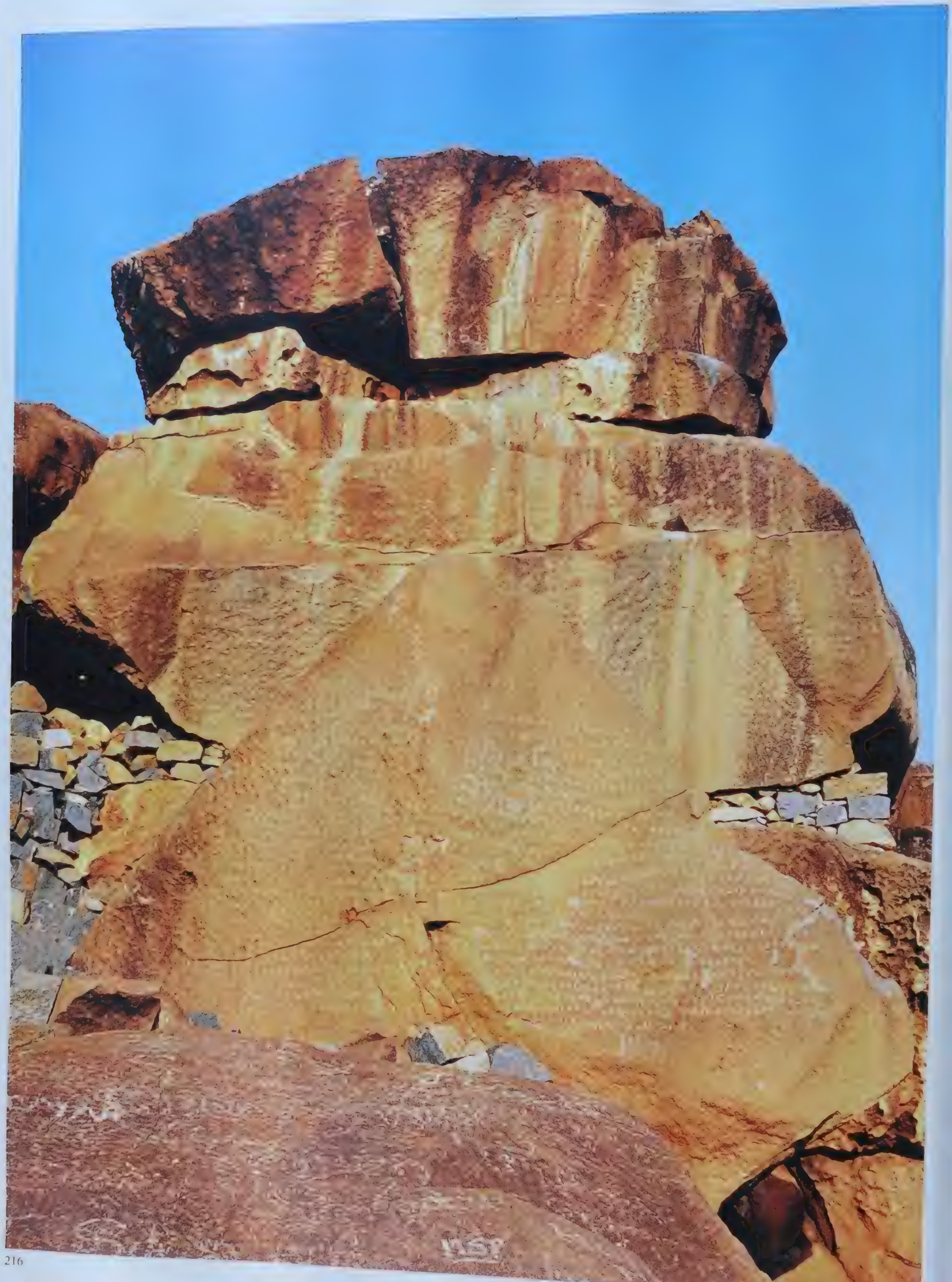
On terraced platforms are built Stupas with rock rubble and have been plastered allowing a narrow circumambulatory path. On the summit of the hill lies a Mahastupa that has not survived except at the base. The rest of the hill looks ravaged with hardly any evidence of its former glory. All these terraced constructions could be dated to the early centuries of the Christian era. It is likely that the earlier structures of the pre-Christian era were used as a base to extend the Mahastupa.

There is a natural cavern at the entrance of the hill that was probably the first habitation on the hill. The cavern had been chiselled and vaulted during a later stage to accommodate a platform while making the whole arrangement look like a cell. Vaulted roofing could be seen several meters deep into the cavern. An entire path has been carved from the cavern leading up to the hill. The area is some distance south to the thick forests of the Nallamalla. This area could have also been even more forested during the early historic period.

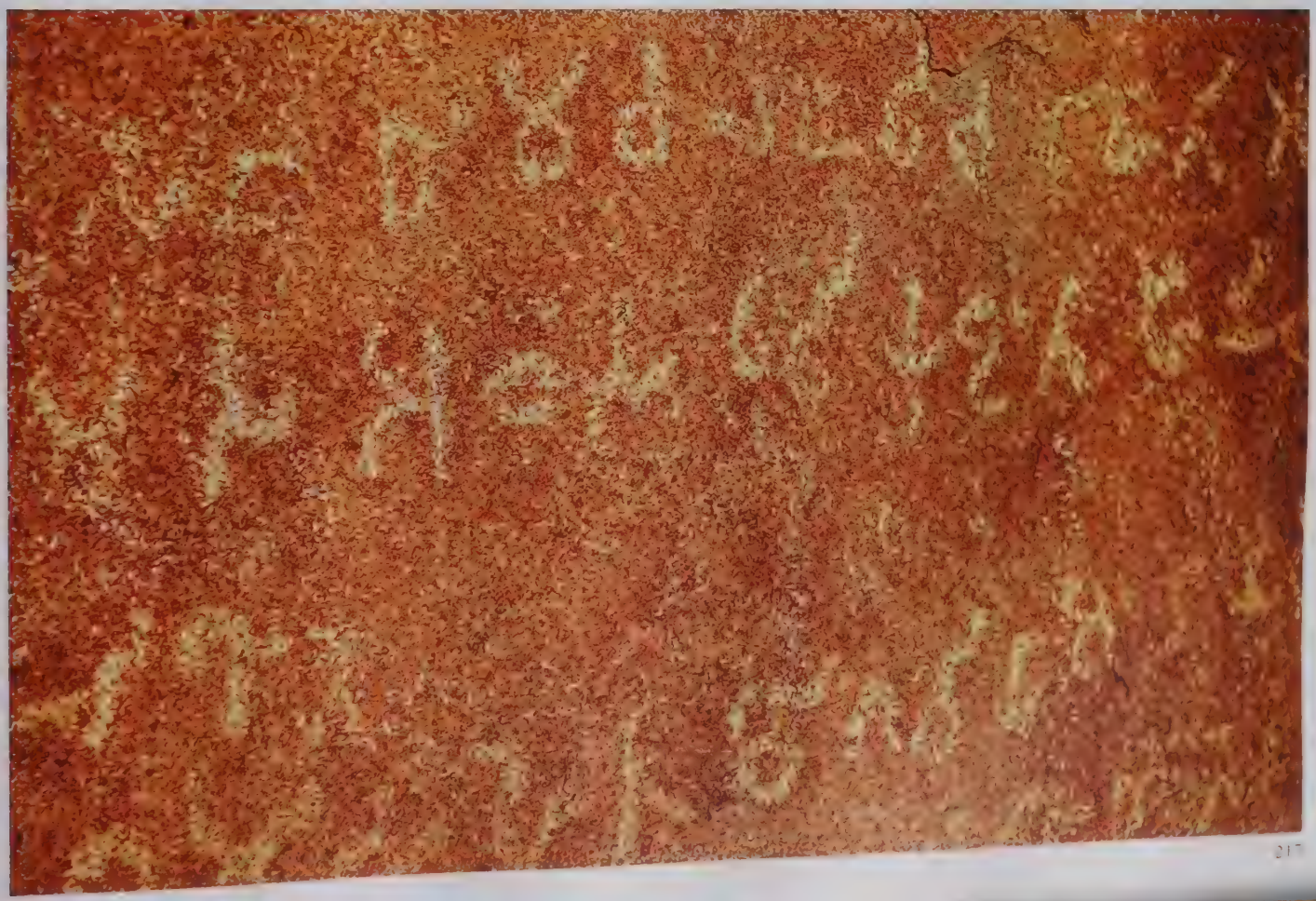
The summit of the hill gives a beautiful view of the countryside. The water of the Cheyyeru and the salubrious ambience could have been the perfect backdrop to the Buddhist establishment about which there is not much of information but for an inscribed label belonging to 1st and 2nd CE on a broken Buddhapada slab reading "...naysa Vinayadharasa Budhino Dheya Dhama" meaning the gift to the lord Buddha by somebody who was proficient in the Vinaya, the Code of Monastic Rules.


erragudi
256 – 253 BCE

Erragudi is a village 8 kilometres from the nearest town of Gutty on the Anthapur and Kurnool District borders in Rayalaseema. on a mound locally called Enugulakonda are engraved 8 major and 5 minor edicts of the Mauryan emperor Piyadassi Asoka. The edicts were probably engraved here sometime between 256 and 253 BCE



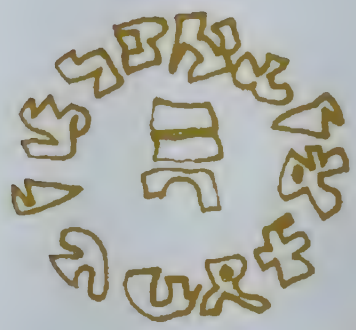
The significance of these edicts has been discussed since they were first discovered in 1928. The mound is very close to several other sites where similar rock edicts were found. The purpose of the edicts was probably to let the local populace know that an authority was now in place implying that they were no longer the free people that they once were. The area around Erragudi especially towards Ananthapur to the south and Chittor to the southwest are Megalithic sites concurrent with time of the edicts. To the west of Erragudi there were gold and diamond mines that came under Mauryan regime soon after the conquest of Kalinga.



# dhulikatta

**2nd BCE – 2nd CE**

Dhulikatta is a small hamlet 11 kilometres interior to the road between Karimnagar and Peddapalli in Telengana. At some distance to the village at place called Rangajama is a creek adjacent to that lays a Buddhist complex dating back to the 2nd BCE. The complex was part of a fort belonging to the pre-Satavahana period that also used during the Satavahana era. The Stupa consisted of a brick drum of 2 metres height over a single layer of rubble basement. The dome rises over a platform to a height of 5 metres crowned by a Harmika and a Chattra.

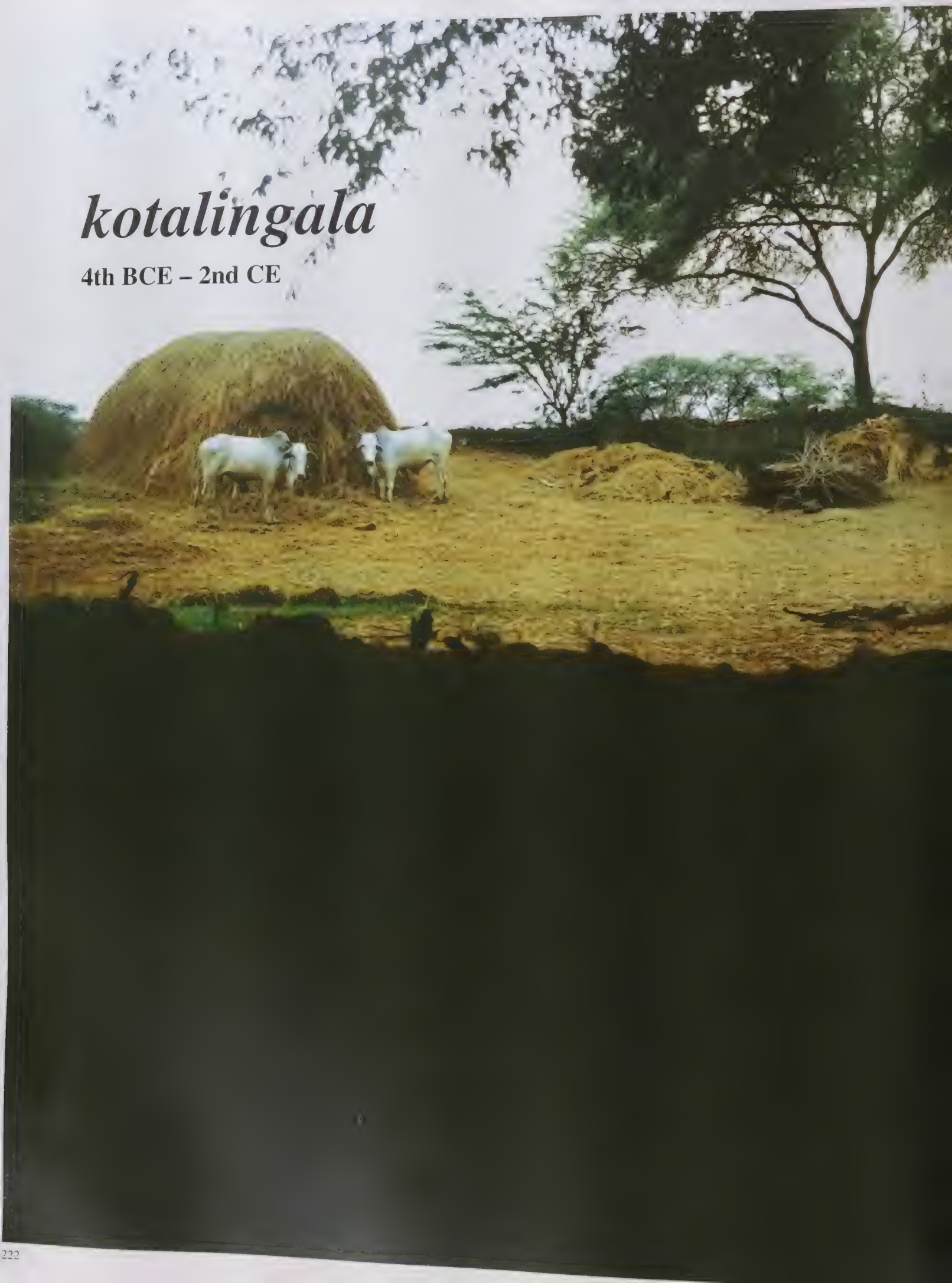


The platform of the Stupa was encased with 47 sculpted panels that seem very different from art known of that period. They include almost all the Buddhist themes that are represented at Dhanyakataka. The craft however is very different. Recently scholars have been suggesting that the sculptural idiom seemed to be the precursors of the carving on cave monasteries in western Deccan. The stone used for carving is a locally available hard red stone. By the crude depictions they could be placed contemporaneous to the first phase at Dhanyakataka. Among other material finds are exquisitely carved ivory seals belonging to merchant guilds and local chieftains. An ivory seal bearing the Brahmi legend "Agariya Gama Kumariyasa" carved clock-wise was placed in the early quarter of the 2nd century BCE on paleographic grounds. The first two words Agariya and Gama mean Agariya the village. But the meaning of the word Kumariyasa is not very clear. Dr Krishna Sastry suggests that it could have belonged to a religious establishment centred perhaps on a form of mother-goddess worship.

The last phase of the monastic establishment probably witnessed a major upgradation to the structure.New sculptural elements make their appearance.The green-grey marble like lime stone found in the lower Krishna valley is used in some panels indicating a possible intergration with the coastal zone in terms of both trade and polity. There is also a significant amount of sophistication in craft. It seemly likely that the begining of the final phase at Dhulikatta could be put at around last quarter of the first century of the Chrisitian era.The abandonment of the monastery could have preceeded that of the fortified township sometime in the 2nd century.

# *kotalingala*

**4th BCE – 2nd CE**



Kotalingala is a fortified ancient town belonging to the pre-Mauryan era. It is one of the earliest known towns of that period. Excavations since the 1970's have brought to light brick bastions on the four corners along with brick built wells, drains, granaries, apsidal houses with rubble foundation and wealth of material culture.

The fortified town also had a Stupa structure that was probably the earliest known. The present village of Kotalingala is built entirely from the debris of the ancient fortification bricks. The wells that were dug during the pre-Christian era are still being used for agricultural purposes. A Buddhist complex was laid bare in the 1960's on a hill at Paishgoan that is very near to Kotalingala. Perhaps the Stupa in Kotalinga was a votive structure and Pashigoan was the monastic complex. Sadly, the Pashigoan site had been thoroughly ravaged leaving no trace but for this picture taken during the excavations in the mid-1970's.

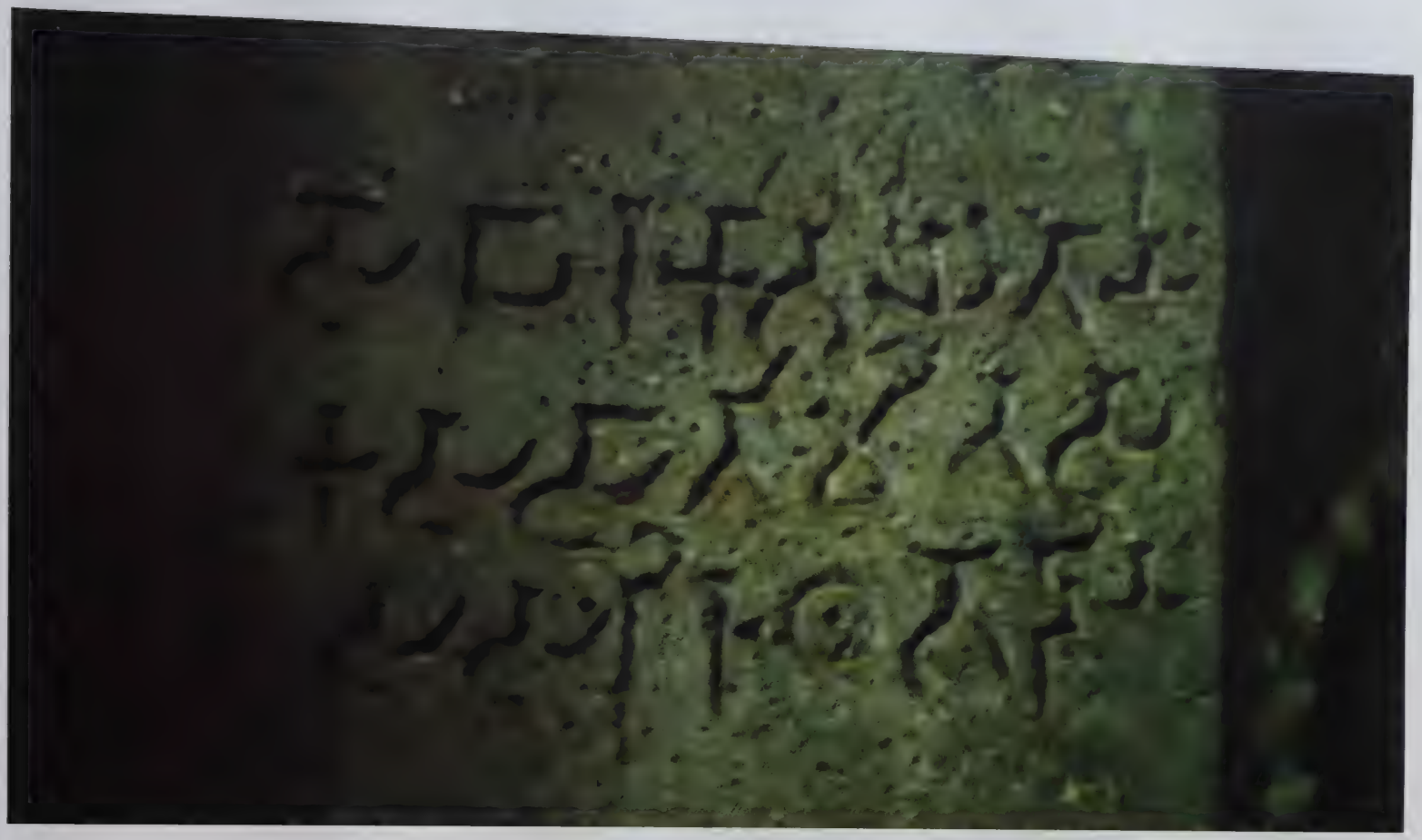
# *karle*

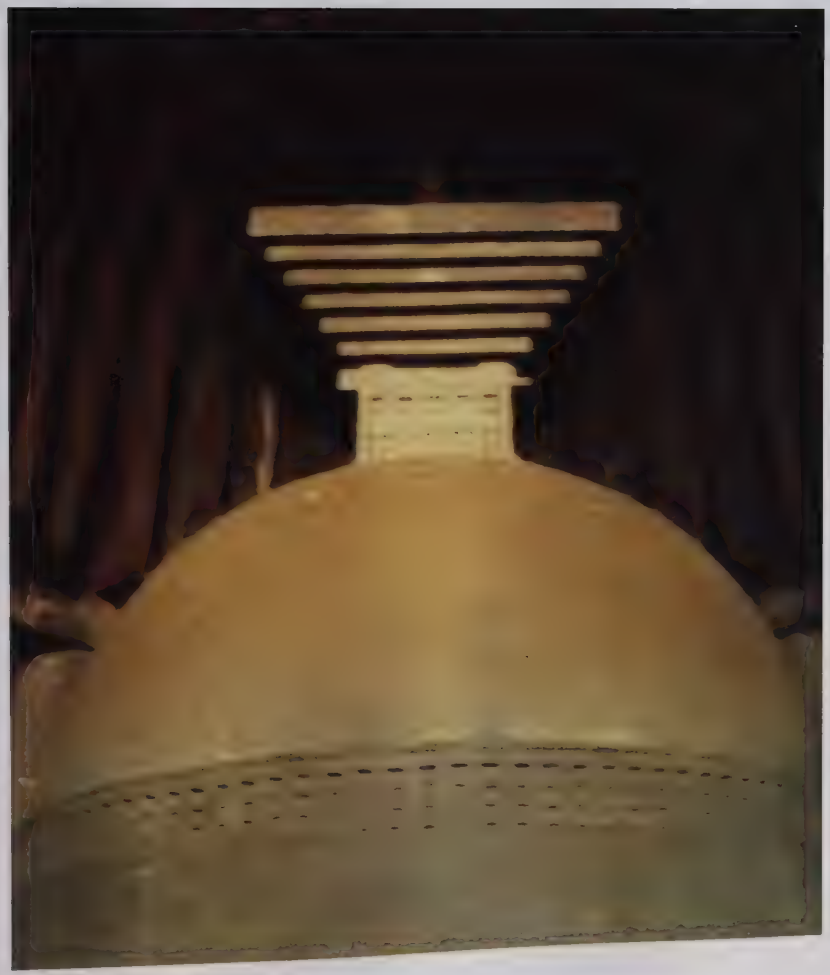
**2nd BCE – 6th CE**

Karle is located on the Pune and Mumbai expressway. The Buddhist cave monastery here is divided into two phases. The first period belongs to the pre-Christian era and is predominantly Theravada. Around the turn of the 1st century of the Christian era the second phase was inaugurated with the carving of the Chaitya hall. The living quarters of the monks towards the west of the Chaityahall were however used even in later times. The Chaitya hall is 45 feet in height, 124 feet in length and 46 feet in breadth.

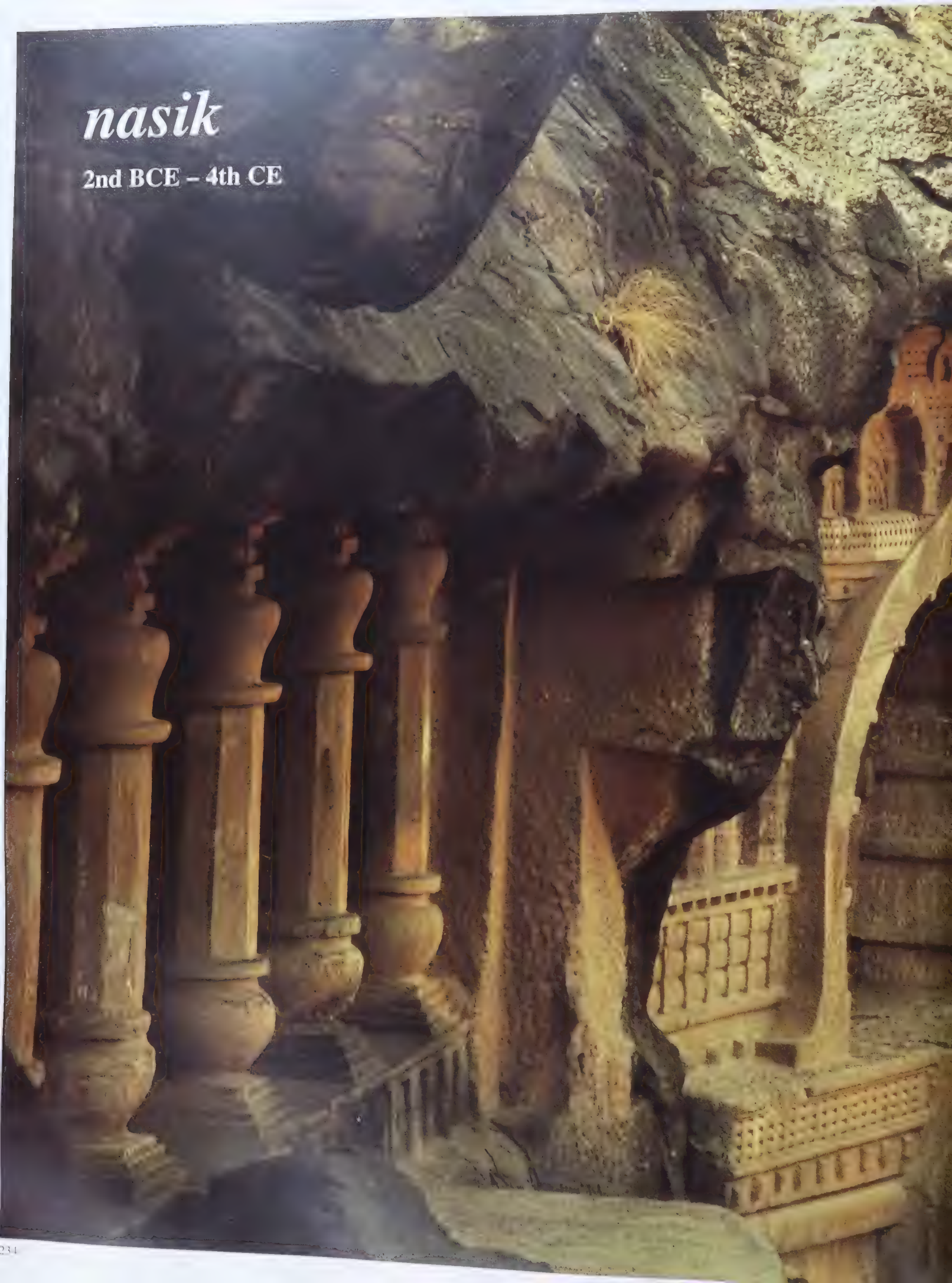
Karle is one the most spectacular monuments in the subcontinent. The ornate façade consists of two stories with three doorways piercing the lower part. There is again an upper gallery over which are still to be seen the remains concentric arches forming a pediment. The interning spaces between the doorways are decorated with sculpture ranging from the Satavahana period to the late Gupta era.

At the beginning of the long corridor common to all the constructions at the monastery there is a two-storied monastic dwelling connected by a rock-cut staircase leading upstaris to a rectangular room measuring 18 ft in breadth and 43 ft in length complete with a rock-cut door and two views looking upon the valley. A similar rectangular room finely carved out of rock is found downstairs. It seems likely that both these dwellings were carved during the early Satavahana period.



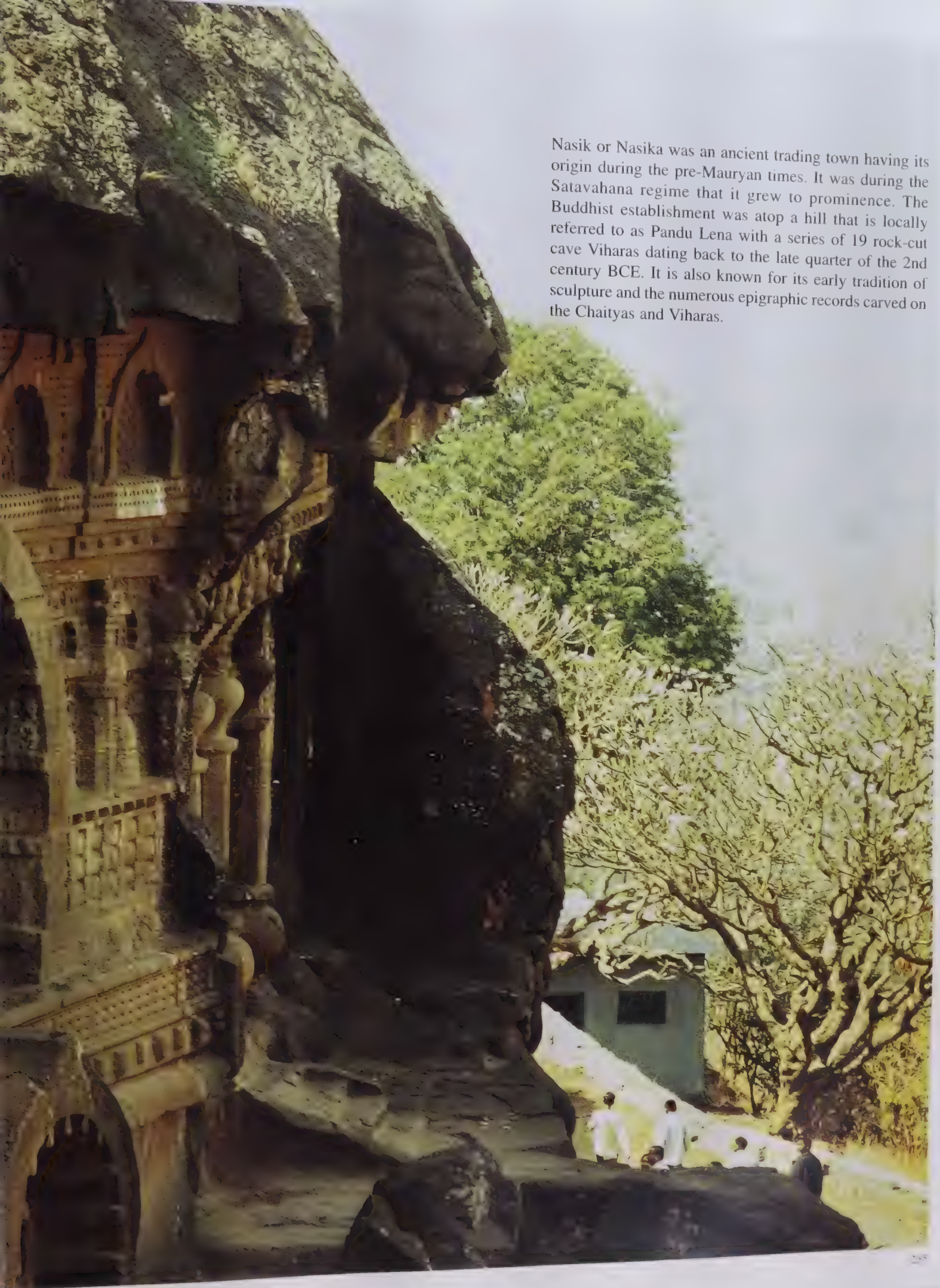


Towards the end of the common corridor there are several trail excavations on rock probably dating to the period after the construction of the main Chaitya hall that must have been under construction even during the brief rule of the Kshatrapas evidenced by a donative inscription on a carved Persipolitian pillar containing the name of Nahapana. The main chaitya hall and its chapel like arrangment show stricking resemblences of Roman architectural planning and design. The Persipolitians fitted with wooden architraves culminate forward to a spectacular view of the Stupa which is a simple hemispherical dome with a Harmika and a wooden Chattra. Interestingly much of the wood work in the Chaitya hall belongs to the period when the it was first carved. The wood was chemically treated to survive millennia of weathering.



# *nasik*

**2nd BCE – 4th CE**

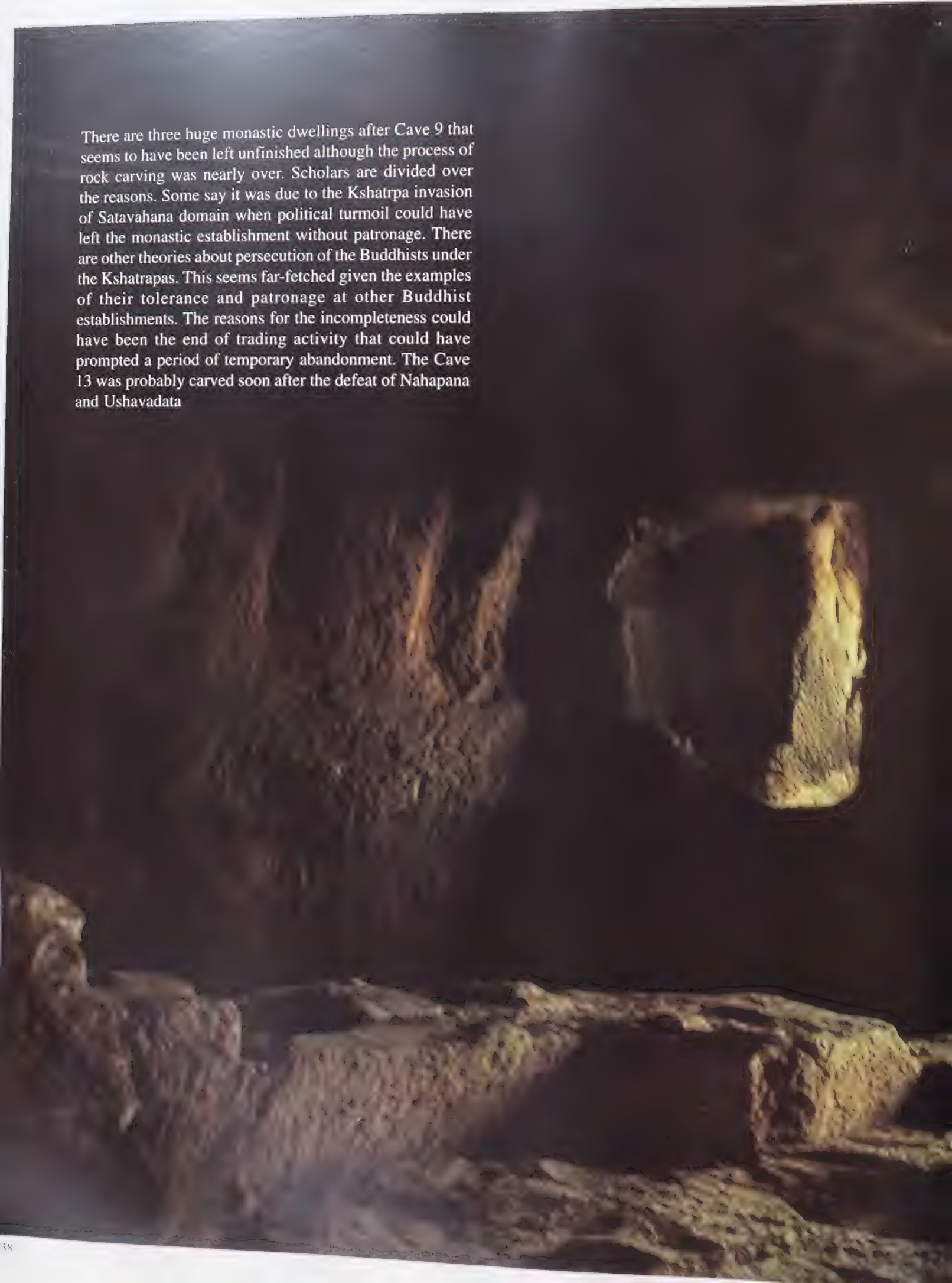


Nasik or Nasika was an ancient trading town having its origin during the pre-Mauryan times. It was during the Satavahana regime that it grew to prominence. The Buddhist establishment was atop a hill that is locally referred to as Pandu Lena with a series of 19 rock-cut cave Viharas dating back to the late quarter of the 2nd century BCE. It is also known for its early tradition of sculpture and the numerous epigraphic records carved on the Chaityas and Viharas.

The earliest of the rock-cut caves invariably have large and small votive structures that prove the spread and influence of Chaitya cults from the lower Krishna valley linked to Nasik directly through trade routes. The guilds of the Satavahana period were prospering in trade with Rome. The merchants were the chief donors of these caves. The extended their patronage by influencing the Satavahana kings to provide the monks with land grants. The establishment at Nasik has several inscriptions recording land grants by kings and the ruling elite of the Satavahana period.

At the entrance of Cave 5 there is a sculpture of the Dwarapala having idiomatic resemblances to the mature phase at Dhulikatta in the Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. Active trade throughout the early historic period connected the places and both have revealed fortifications of the pre-Mauryan to Satavahana period. This sculpture seems to be the earliest example of art extant at Nasik

There are three huge monastic dwellings after Cave 9 that seems to have been left unfinished although the process of rock carving was nearly over. Scholars are divided over the reasons. Some say it was due to the Kshatrpa invasion of Satavahana domain when political turmoil could have left the monastic establishment without patronage. There are other theories about persecution of the Buddhists under the Kshatrapas. This seems far-fetched given the examples of their tolerance and patronage at other Buddhist establishments. The reasons for the incompleteness could have been the end of trading activity that could have prompted a period of temporary abandonment. The Cave 13 was probably carved soon after the defeat of Nahapana and Ushavadata



Cave 13 is popularly called the Gotamiputta Vihara for its famous inscription detailing the life of Gotamiputta Satakanni carved on the sill of the entrance by his mother Balasiri which is by far the most authentic record of the later Satavahanas. The entire cave is highly embellished leading to a huge Chaitya hall with an image of the Buddha in a teaching posture.

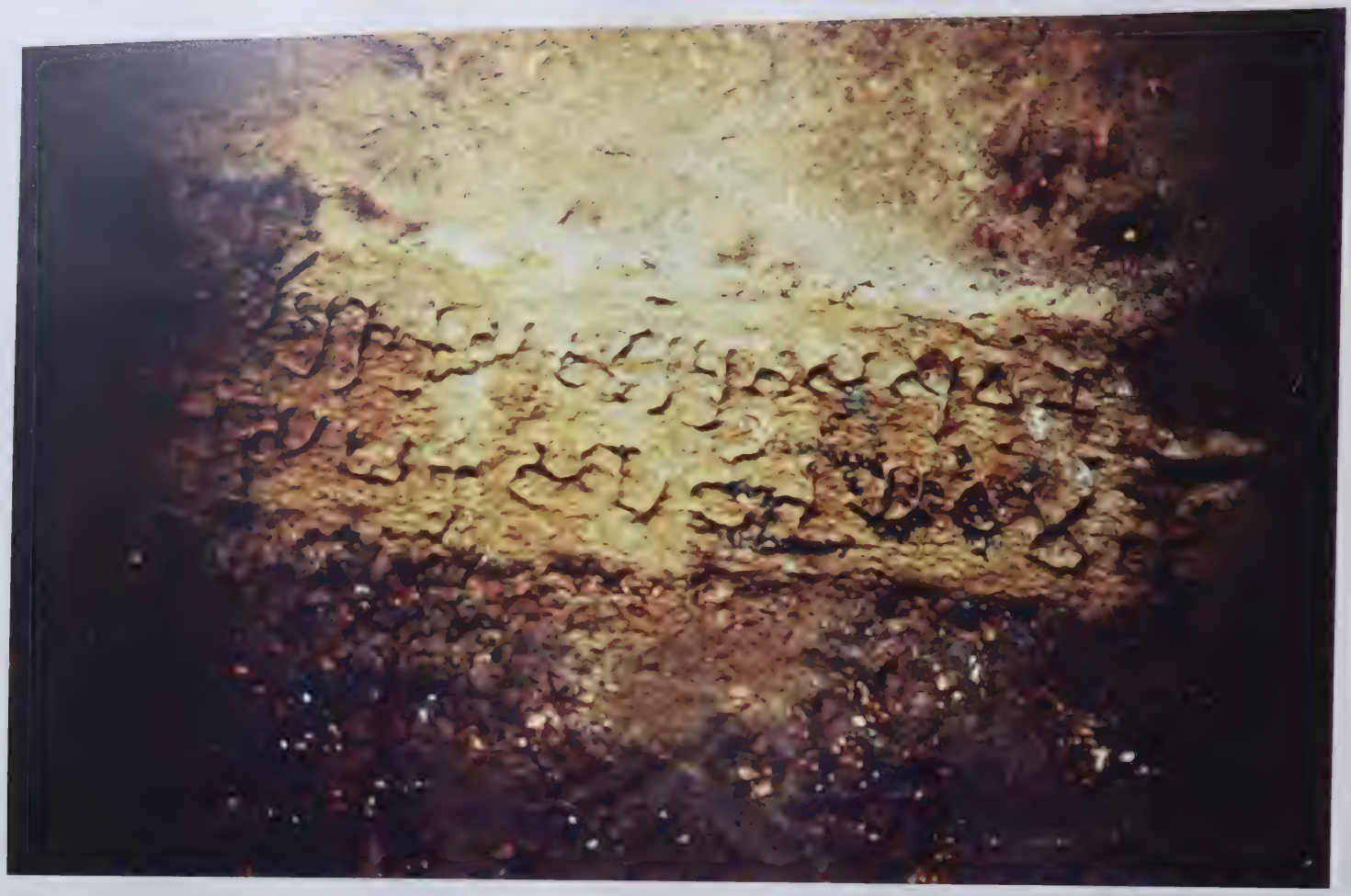
The caves after the 13th have many images of the Buddha in meditative posture like this one on the lower portion of a Stupa in cave 17. These caves were carved in the post-Satavahana times with no inscriptional records in the last two caves. The iconography of the Buddha seems to have been influenced by the Mathura school, probably denoting the Yogacara school of Mahayana dating to the 4th and 5th centuries of the Christian era. The monastic established was probably abandoned during the same period or immediately after.

# *junnar*

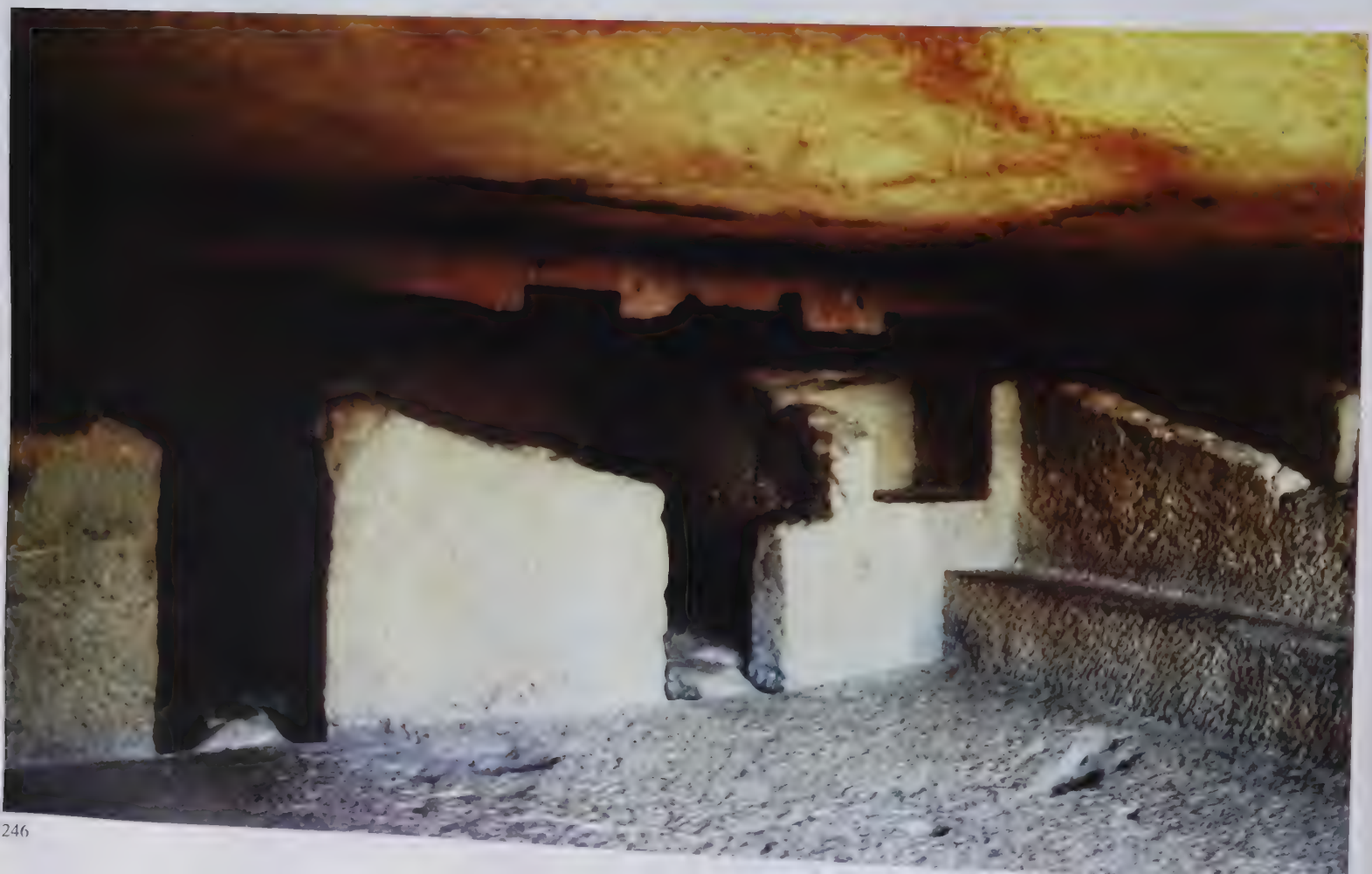
## 2nd BCE – 7th CE

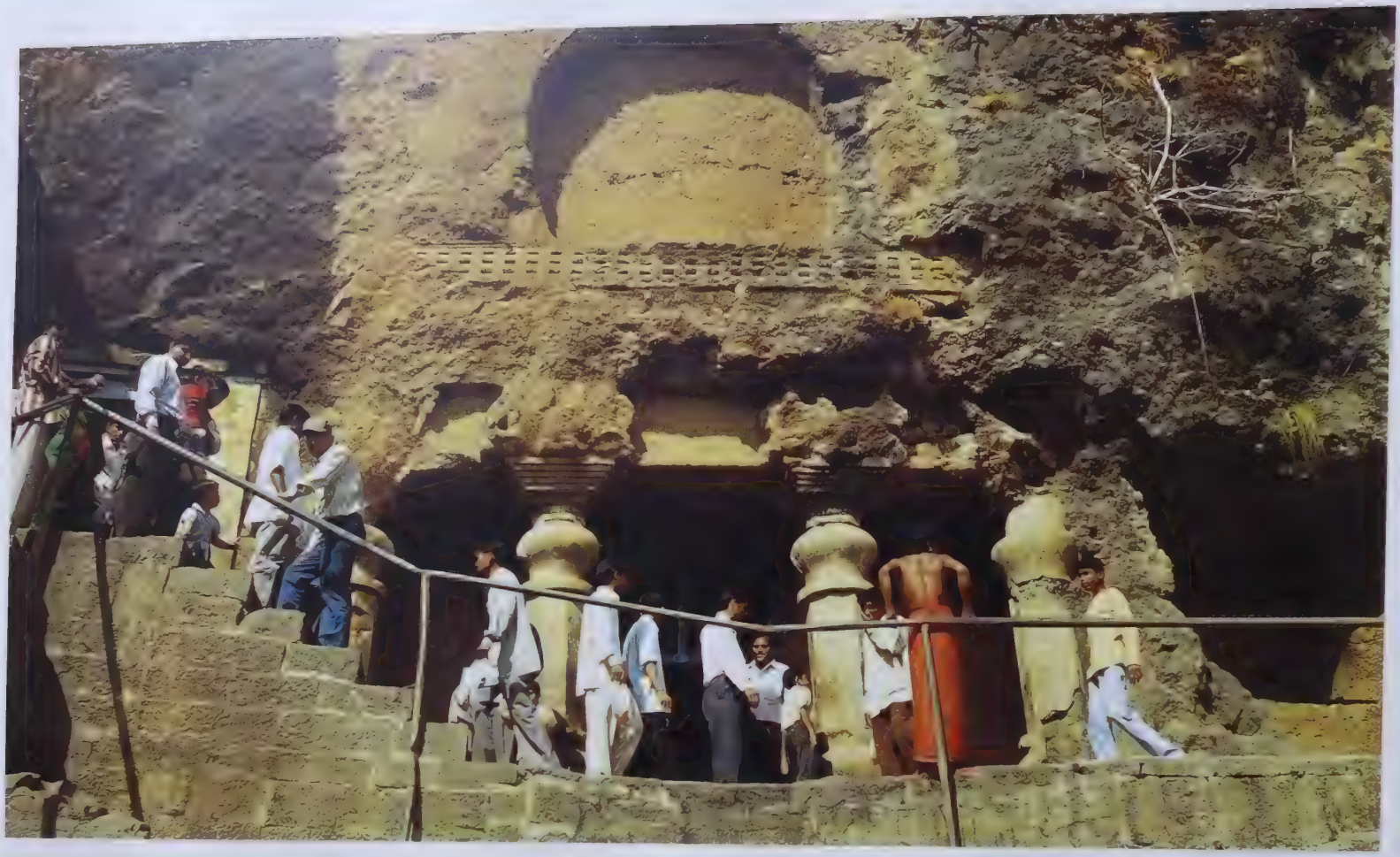
Junnar is 177 kilometres from Mumbai, on the Mumbai-Aurangabad route. It is also popular as the birthplace of the Maratha king Shivaji. The hills surrounding the plains of Junnar are honeycombed with a cluster of Buddhist caves. These caves could be divided into three groups. Some 5 kilometres west of the modern town of Junnar are the Tulja Lena group of caves. The second is situated one and half kilometres south of the town that are referred to as Manmoda caves. The third and the largest group of caves called the Ganesh Lena is 4 kilometres south of Junnar close to Nanaghat famous for its row of statues of the early Satavahana kings with an inscription of the Satavahana queen Naganika.

The Ganesh Lena has 58 caves carved during the early historic period dating slightly before the 2nd century BCE. Much of the early carving, including the main Chaitya at Cave 6, seems to have been directly influenced by the Mauryan era rock-cut caves in the Barbara hills near Gaya in Bihar.

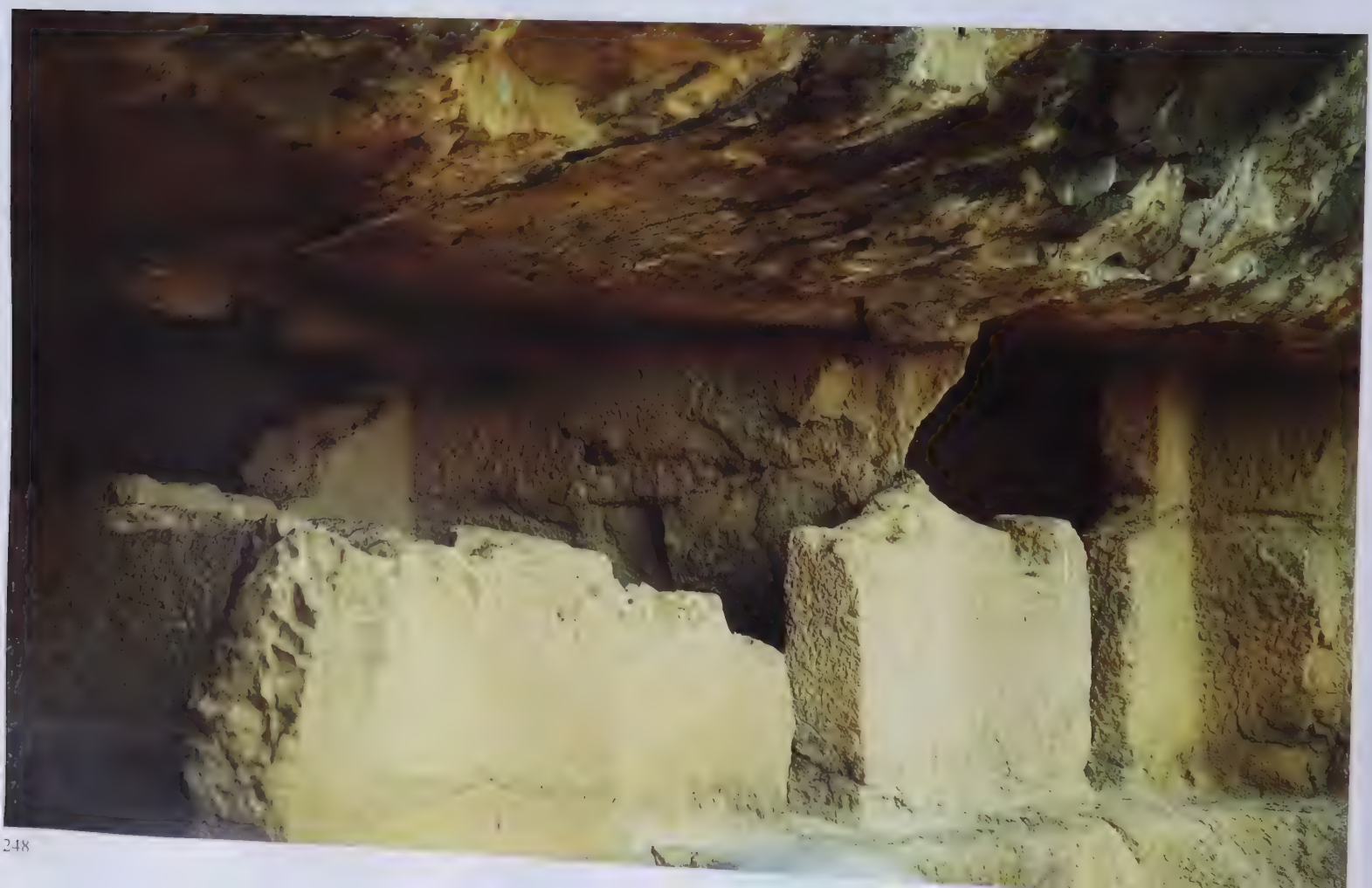


One of the most prominent features at Junnar are the number of cells meant for dwelling and congregating. The Ganesh Lena series and the other two would have housed anywhere between two to three thousand monks at any given point of time when the monastery was habitated. A number of water storage troughs were built. On one of them is an inscription about a General in the Satavahana army, without the mention of name, who donated land and money to the monks.





The caves are unevenly distributed in two stories connected by the number of rock-cut staircases. In one of the earliest caves on the top floor is an exquisitely curved circular Stupa with carved Persipolitians. The dome is carved in the shape of a vaulted barrel with the architraves resembling and inverted wicker basket akin to the Guntapalle rock-cut caves in Andhra Pradesh.



The main chaitya has been converted to a shrine for Vinayaka or Ganesh in modern times. The monastic establishment led an uninterrupted existence upto the end of the 7th century of the Christian era. This finely carved monastic entrance to a vast congregation hall could be dated to the period just before abandonment sometime around the early decades of the 8th century CE.

# *carving emptiness*

The situation of a Buddhist monastery in a specific ethnosphere, its role in facilitating trade and its purpose as a source of succour suggest that sculptural art in the lower Krishna Valley was an inclusive part of the monastery as elsewhere in early Andhra. It was fulfilling a ritual role as per its ordained function of providing visual inspiration to the circumambulating votary. It would be reasonable to free the sculptor and his accomplishment from a religious role but discussion on the merits of his art would be incomplete without taking into account the impact such erudition could have entailed on the religion, its laity, his patrons and above all to those who discovered him under several layers of time two millennia later.

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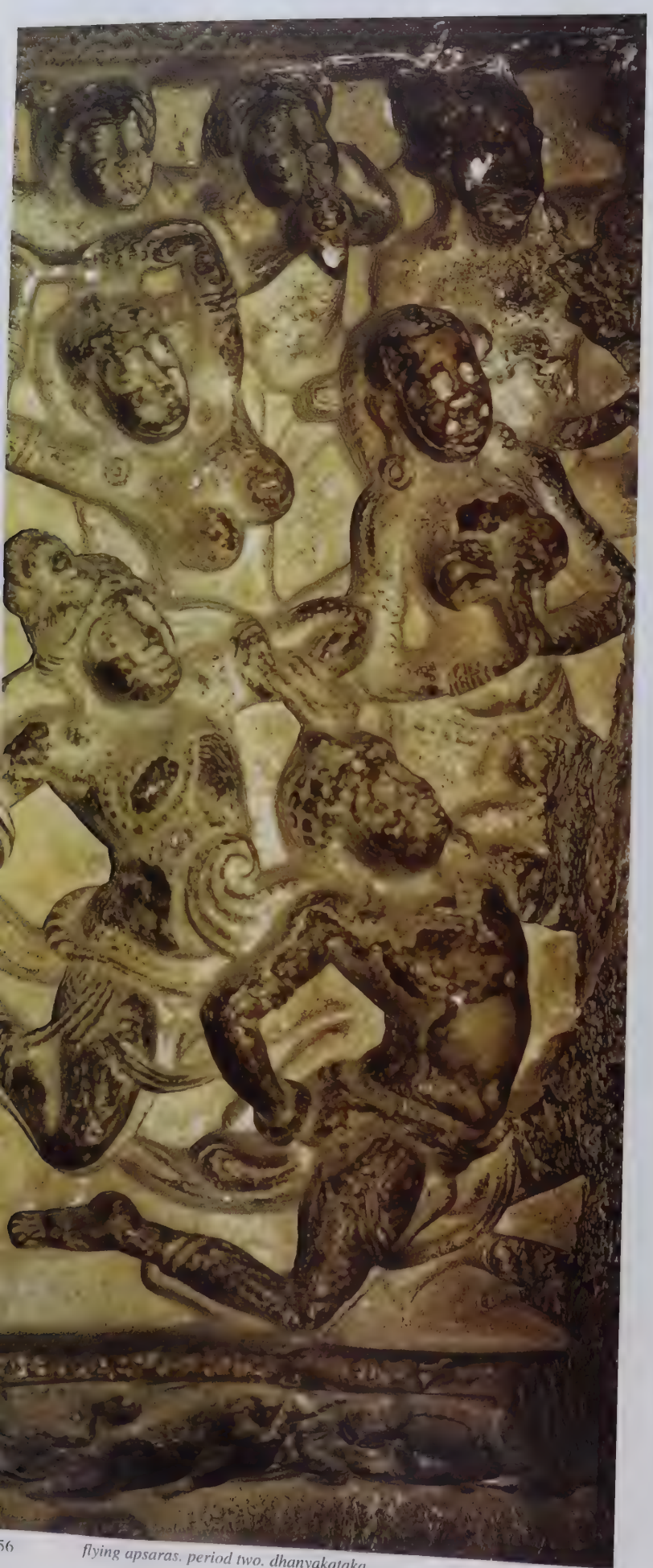
*bodhisattva maitreya. period two. dhanyakataka.*

Sculptural art found at Amaravati or ancient Dhanyakataka in the lower Krishna valley is often viewed as representing the entire array of art found in ancient Andhra. The regional variations in the other aspects of Buddhism seem also to extend towards art. The Dhulikatta site near Karimnagar excavated in 1983 has sculptured panels on the locally available stone that is markedly different from the contemporaneous phase of art being produced at Dhanyakataka. A rugged quality absent even in the first phase at Dhanyakataka is discernible at Dhulikatta. The various objects of art found at Kondapur and Kotalingala have their distinct features bearing no affinity to the lower Krishna Valley. The sites at Phanigiri, Gajulabanda and Tirumalagiri have however a wealth of sculpture in continuum with the fourth phase of Dhanyakataka and the mature phases at Nagarjunakonda. That said one need not actually count these three sites in Nalgonda district outside the cultural influence of the lower Krishna Valley. At Nelakondapalli, in the Khammam district an entire complex of bronze casting was unearthed at the Buddhist establishment there. The Nelakondapalli bronzes have their distinct characteristics. In the north coastal sequence sculpture was found at Bojjanakonda near Anakapalle, Ramathirtham and Salihundam in the Vijayanagaram and Srikakulam districts respectively have no relation to Dhanyakataka. The western Deccan with its cave monasteries however seem to be exceptions, though not entirely. There seem to be affinities in the style of painting at Ajanta and the mature phases at Dhanyakataka. Sculptural art again is very discrete at Bhaja, Karle or Nasik for instance. The profusion of plastic art at Dhanyakataka, the time in terms of centuries that it took to reach its final phases, the extent to which it could influence art of other countries and cultures within Andhra and the originality of its aesthetics are some reasons why it became synonymous with the Andhra art.

*naga muchilinda. 1st century CE. chandavaram.*

The earliest extant Buddhist structures in the lower Krishna valley date back to the 3rd century BCE. Stupas found at Bhattiprolu and Dhanyakataka seem to have had on them stucco embellishments that did not survive. From contemporary literary sources it appears that plastic art was still in the hands of masters in wood, ivory, terracotta and stucco. Stone sculpture must have been an extension of the other media especially wood. Each region where the earliest sculptural traditions had taken root found their own variation of stone that was locally available. Sculptors of the Mauryan era chose a particular buff-coloured sand stone from Chunar that could take a mirror like polished finishing to the many pillars and capitals found throughout the eastern Gangetic region. The sculptors of Sanchi and Barhut employed a deep red-bordering-on-brown rock that was native to central India. The expert carvers at Mathura opted for a spotted variety of sand stone from the present day Tantpur and Bayana in eastern Uttar Pradesh. In the same way the artists at Dhanyakataka and the near by towns adopted a greyish-green coloured stone that was easy to mould and resembled marble. Huge slabs of this exquisite rock was quarried, polished and then transported through inland and river routes of the lower Krishna valley. The region between the rivers Krishna and Godavari with its land and sea routes contributed largely for the development of art, culture and commerce and with a happy blend of foreign and regional styles of art. Art and sculpture through Buddhism reached their zenith during the period from 2nd century BCE to 4th century of the Christian era. Plastic art had an extensive development within the region of the Satavahanas. This region had its own style of art through the vast network of Buddhist sites and trade routes to which, the later paintings of Ajanta bear testimony. But in the post-Ikshvaku period Buddhist art flourished largely in the western Deccan. Sculpture had its beginning in the regions of Guntur, Krishna, and Nalgonda districts during the regimes of Satavahanas, Khatrapas, Ikshvakus, Sakas and Vakatakas and later extending to Karle and Sanchi.

Buddhist sculpture from Mathura, Sanchi and Barhut had their own distinct mark. The art that was produced at Dhanyakataka had its own style that had reached a very mature phase as early as the 2nd century BCE. Similarly the art of Ajanta caves during the first four centuries is similar to the carved representations on railing pillars and bas-reliefs from Dhanyakataka, Bhattiprolu, Velagiri or modern Jaggayyapeta, Nagarjunakonda. At the current level of information available on the history of ancient art in Andhra we can say that painting and sculpture under the patronage of Satavahana, Khatrapa, Ikshvaku and Saka regimes had reached its zenith and was the base for the development of sculptural traditions in the Deep South and to the artistic traditions during succeeding eras.



56 *flying apsaras. period two. dhanyakataka.*

The development of land and sea routes by that time helped outside influences to leave their mark on sculpture. The divergence in Buddhism after the Nirvana of Buddha, had given a fresh impetus to the diversity and development of Buddhist art and sculpture in this region. In the beginning the artists represented the Buddha with Triratnas, Swastika and the Bo tree. The need of representing the Buddha in a human form with divine features led to the iconic representation that was gradually adapted by all the various sects of Buddhists.

The representations of the Buddha icon only got more sophisticated as centuries passed. This was simultaneous with the representations of the various births of the Buddha and the Jataka tales, each region having their own favourites themes that were repeated. In time almost all the Buddhist establishments had sculptural art where they were postioned on pillars and encasements with carvings of the Bo tree, wheel of Dharma, horses and other mythical animals resembling those found at sites in the lower Krishna valley. On the four sides of inner railings are exquisite carvings depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha and the Jatakas.

The slabs were divided geometrically. Sculptors under one supervising chief designed several models on various media and then were put to discussion where a final shape emerged based on the renditions of the Buddha legend and the Jataka fables apart from taking in as much input from the donors who favoured specific subjects within the realm of stories. We have enough reason to believe that much of the carvings also depended on donors who ranged from ladies of the royal harem to the ordinary householder.

The earliest period is between 200 and 100 BCE also called the archaic period although an earlier date is being suggested based on stratigraphic study. The base slabs, as usual in all early Stupas, depict pilasters at intervals with animals above bell-shaped capitals and laity adoring the Buddha who is symbolically depicted. The human figures along with animals and other figures appear flat possessing more strength then proportion and occupy space. The apparel, like the dothi and the turban, the ornaments are well delineated and being more than conventional adornments, reflect contemporary modes. The figures of men and boys driving bulls, deer and elephants are cleverly done. The human figure is characterised by a certain amount of stiffness and by a rather awkward array of poses devoid of graceful flexions. The animal forms are rather heavy, powerful and elongate. The Makara, which had yet to become the recurring motif of later epochs and the lotus in all stylised representation alongside the celestial swan, make their first appearances during this phase. Much of this period is seen represented at Velagiri along with Dhanyakataka.

Most of them were destroyed with the few exceptions that survived mostly because the reverse sides of these panels were used in carving during the mature fourth phase. These earliest sculpture excluding those that have been lost, destroyed or looted are very few to count. Jagayyapeta, which is the modern little town some 71 kilometres from Vijayawada towards Hyderabad or Velagiri, yielded some sculpture fragments. The most noteworthy among these reliefs are the many pilasters with campanulate capitals adorned with winged animals, one representing a king surrounded by emblems of royalty and another representing a Chaitya with laity, the form of which is of special architectural interest. It is a portrayal of a shrine with a facade of four pillars provided with a flight of steps in the foreground. The central portion enshrines a Buddhapada protected by a parasol and with hanging garlands on either side, while the side compartments between the pillars have in each a standing woman, one of them holding a vase of flowers. The shrine is surmounted by another storey with an arched roof crowned with ornamental finials and Chaitya windows at the sides.

*yashti. remnant of the mahastupa. 2nd century CE. dhanyakataka.*

*adoration of the buddha. period two. dhanyakataka*

258 *ajatasatru paying respects to the buddha. 1st century CE. nandayapalem.*

To the second period are attributed the casing slabs above the platform. These slabs dating from about 100 BCE and the first century of the Christian era are broad and of varying heights containing superposed panels depicting in form the Buddha preaching, in addition to symbolic representations of the Master, the examples of the Punnaghatta or the Buddhapadas placed on the throne or the Dhammachakra or the Stupa. There are also leonine animals and over those a double frieze of tridents. These forms along with the inscriptions that they carry convey that they belong to a period earlier than the railings of the next period. The figures are more graceful and natural than those of the first period. The stiffness and awkwardness of the first period disappears to bring in an elegance that improves further to become the hallmark of the Dhanyakataka style towards the two other periods of maturity. The sculptured slabs belonging to the second period are more numerous than the fragments of the first period, though scarcer compared to those of the next phases. Taken together they represent

*sculpture motif. period three. dhanyakataka.*

successively the principal scenes of the Buddha's life, where he is now depicted for the first time in human form and mostly in the preaching posture. This is the earliest known personification of the Buddha. It seems probable that the personification could have been simultaneous to the earliest known Mathura icons of the Buddha.

*...the master damaged bas relief.3rd century CE.phanigiri.*

There is a tendency to overlook the fact that the Buddha icon was first represented on bas-relief and not in singular stone. There is hardly any evidence to show that the Buddha icon was presented in any bas-relief from the northwest of ancient India associated to the Gandhara School, and at such an early date as 100 BCE. It seems more likely that the Icon was first carved at Dhanyakataka as can be evidenced from historical facts regarding the Mahasanghikas who were the first to proclaim the superhuman nature of the Buddha and were by 100 BCE firmly established in the lower Krishna valley. The important finds of this period include a much-weathered depiction of Asoka watering the Bo tree and the attempt of Mara to entice the Master with his daughters and gnomes.

*(left and right) adoration of the buddha in form of a throne.period three (dhanyakataka)*

In both the cases the human form in execution and composition reaches to a model proportion for the succeeding generations of sculptors. The most noticeable feature of the second period is the depiction of women who appear nude while being draped. The detail that these women are clothed is clear from the double lines over the legs showing the folds and lines of the apparel. The presence of the thick waistbands and loops and the arrangement of the small fan-like central flounce apparently placed to cover the nakedness that is so distinctive to sculpture of the post-Dhanyakataka periods is absent here.

The third period from the first century to 250 of the Christian era has rather conventional designs of the full lotus, embellished with leaves and creepers in concentric bands. At the two ends of the pillars above and below the half discs were sculptures of the Stupa, the Buddha, the Naga and the Bo tree all of which show adorations and dancing dwarfs below. The coping stone was ornamented with a long wavy roll garland of flowers carried by human figures standing at intervals shown to be holding Buddhist motifs of that period. The inner railings of the Mahastupa were filled with a profusion of sculpture notable for their elaboration and beauty of detail with both mythical and

*the buddha preaching. earliest representation. period three. dhanyakataka.*

mundane content. The uprights within the railings bore the Punnapadumas and Addhapadumas above and below were delicately carved reliefs depicting the various Jatakas to the benefit of the circumambulating laity. The installation scheme of the sculptures and the loving detail with which they were carved stood to be the singular inspiration for artistic traditions across Southeast Asia of the Buddhist age.

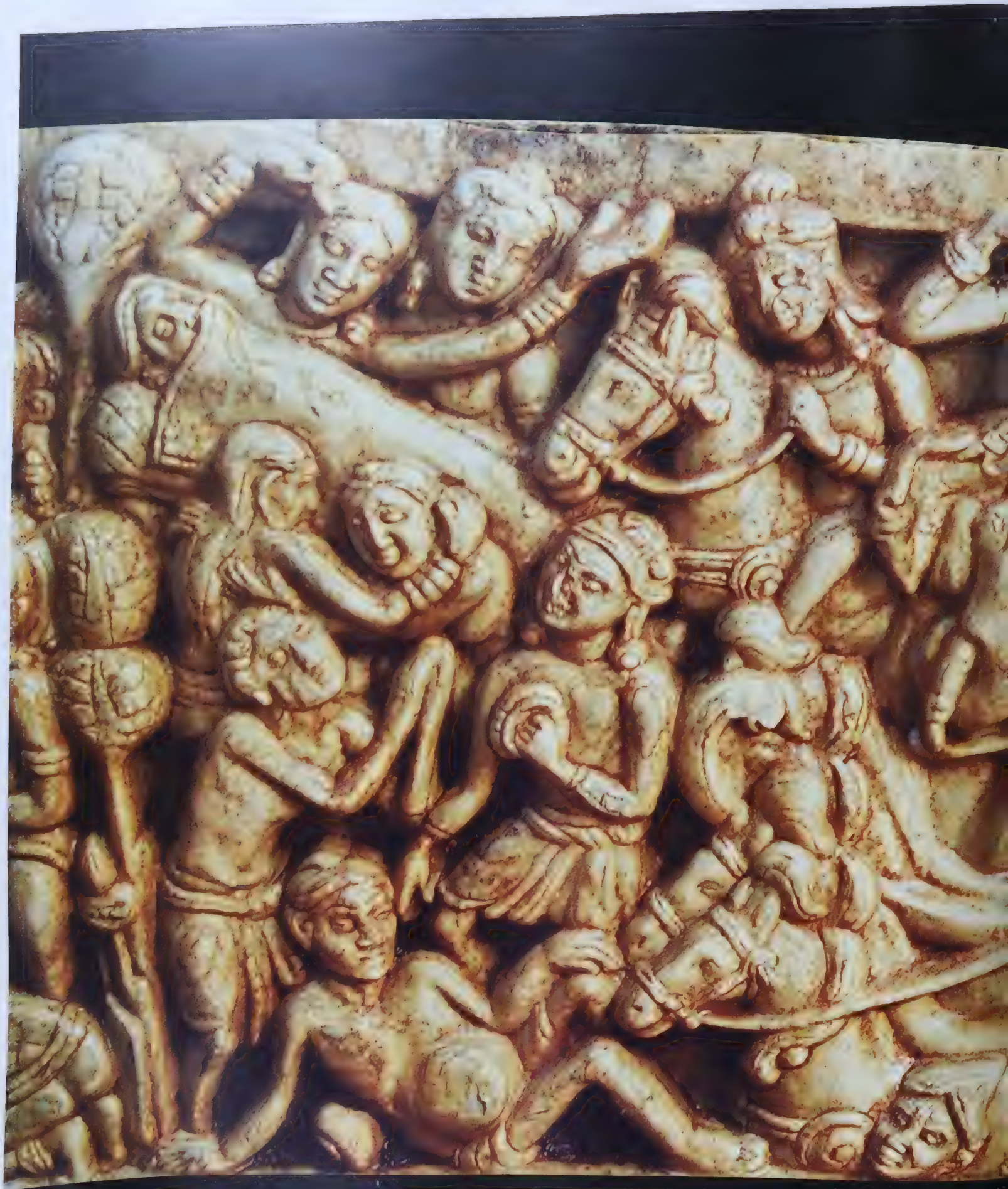
*udayana jataka.period three.dhanyakataka.*

Evidence is more than less clear to suggest that the conclusion of the railings came around the second half of the 2nd century of the Christian era basing on the inscriptions found on them. The railing seems to have been upgraded during the time of Vahittiputta Pulamayi on basis of an inscription by his name although we cannot date the happening in any absolute terms due the discrepancies in Satavahana chronology that had been discussed in some detail elsewhere in this book. There is a very strong Tibetan literary tradition that associates the philosopher Nagarjuna with the construction of the rail. This again is something that we cannot be very certain about though such an occurrence cannot be ruled out. It seems likely that the stone railing might have been a copy of an earlier wooden one. Though much of the stone railing has not survived the remaining portion is attestation enough for the eloquence of how noble and imposing the structure might have once been. The delicacy of the figures and the impression of the soft texture on them are remarkable. Even crowded scenes are marked by a joyous vivacity. The groups are arranged with facile mastery aiming at balance rather then symmetry. However there are signs of meticulous adjustment like the correspondence of numbers and positions on either side designed to achieve an obvious equilibrium, which, is yet not regularity.

The most striking feature of the final phase is the delineation of different planes that were by then achieved with a triumphant ease. The remarkable example is the skill displayed in the demonstration of movement especially in

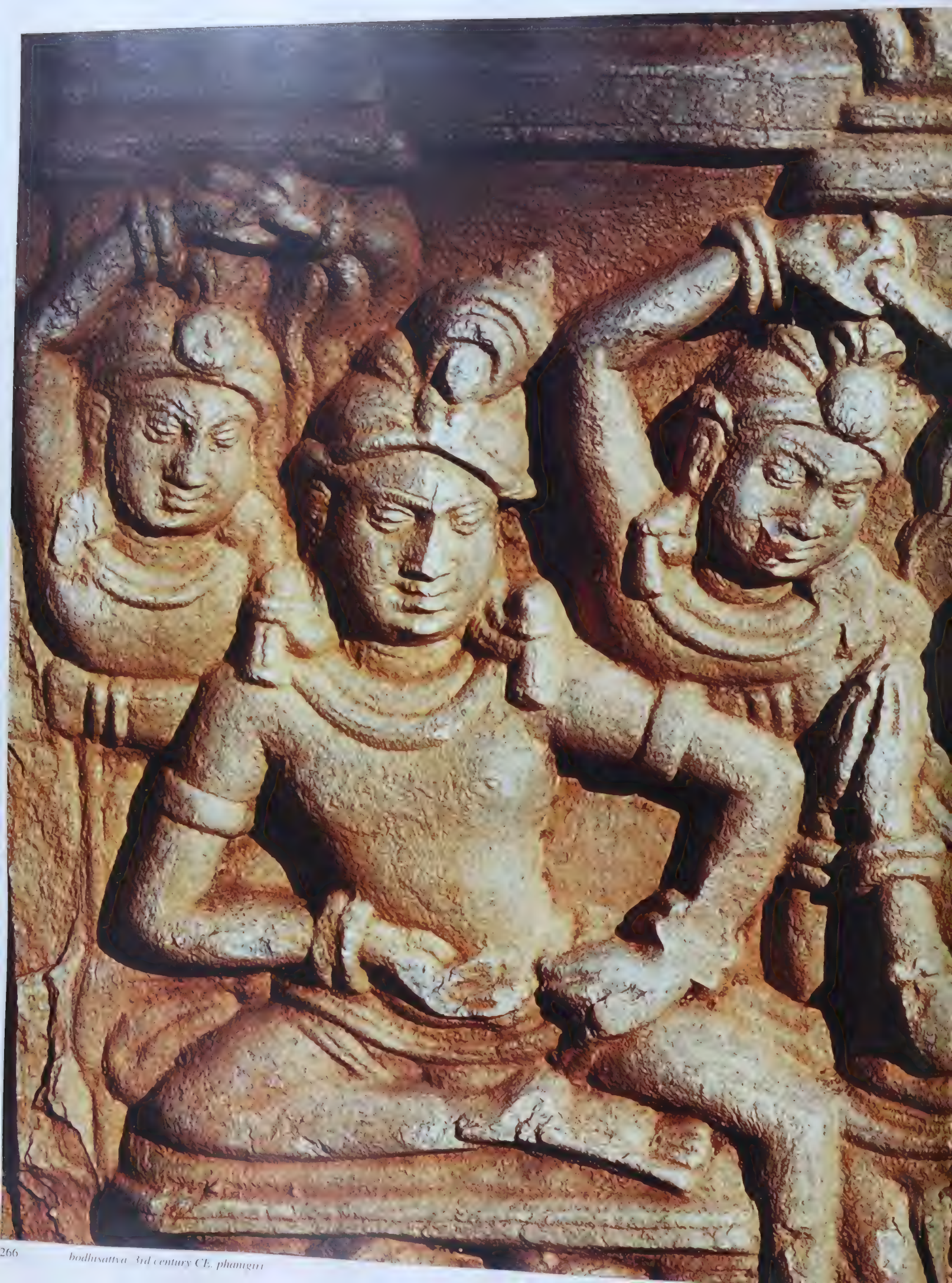
the story of Udayana and his queens where the vivid description is completed with an almost swaggering attitude of the bow in Udayana's hand with the petrified harem. The subjugation of Nalagiri is another gleaming example portraying the confusion created by the elephant running berserk in the streets of Rajagiha. The panels are permeated with an air of realism where the most attractive part is the spirited figures marked by chic movement and expression.

The tone and texture of the stone was perhaps the greatest gain of the sculptor at Dhanyakataka who used it to his advantage. The smoothness of the chiselled lines and its shadow combine to stamp the impression of the last line in beauty. The sculptors showed themselves adept not only in the conventional symbolic representation of things and the events but also in the narrative sequencing of the carvings.





*prince siddhartha escorted by chenna, realisation of dukkha, 3rd century CE, phanigara*



266 *bodhisattva 3rd century CE. phanigiri*

The statues of the Buddha, mostly in the standing posture, are dated around the 3rd century of the Christian era. The grace of these standing Buddha's had been perfected sometime towards the end of the mature phase and the have become the trademarks of the development of Mahayana in the lower Krishna valley. These influences found quick echoes in Sri Lanka and the rest of Southeast Asia. The standing Buddhas bear some kind of an acute gaze but the features are full with a head of short curly hair and a robust body. In all this a sense of benignity in the Buddha that seems to inspire both awe and veneration.

**Nagarjunakonda**

The most important centre of Buddhist art in continuation of the fourth period at Dhanyakataka is at Nagarjunakonda. Nowhere else have such extensive Buddhist remains been brought to light. It was mostly here that after the great age of Dhanyakataka and the Satavahanas, Buddhism and Buddhist art rose to prominence and flourished. The sculpture of Nagarjunakonda on the same light–green marble like limestone was thus a sequel to the earlier Dhanyakataka School and had its beginnings contemporary with the third period of Dhanyakataka art. The carved vertical slabs mostly belong to casing of the drum, about 2 feet wide and as much in height, and the favourite sculptures on them are the representations of the Stupa, while those adorning the more important Ayaka platforms portray some leading event in the life of the Buddha, by scenes or symbols such as the wheel, throne, or Stupa. Above the drum, the slabs encasing the base of the dome are taller (2 feet wide and 3 to 4 feet high) with a graded concavo-convex curvature that fitted on to the rising curve of the dome. Their fronts are separated into two or three horizontal panels, the topmost of which is a frieze ornament running continuously round the dome and marking the limit of the stone work, for what is beyond was finished in plaster and decorated in stucco. Sometimes the top frieze was built separately with smaller horizontal slabs specially cut for the purpose. This frieze was composed of a band of Yakkhas carrying an enormous festoon or garland. The slabs covering the base of the dome called Torana or frieze – slabs for the above reason, are also carved with delightful representations of the Punnaghata, the Trident, the Stupas, and lions in groups of five.

The panels in these contain scenes illustrating the Jatakas. Amongst the events of Buddha's life, the most popular to be depicted are his descent from heaven in the form of a white elephant, queen Maya's conception, the casting of the horoscope after his birth, the great renunciation, the transportation of Gautama's head-dress to heaven, the scene of temptation, the Naga-Muchalinda protecting the Buddha from rain with his broad hood, the first sermon in the deer-park at Sarnath, and the Mahaparinirvana represented

*adoration of the buddha. 3rd century CE. phanigiri.*

by the Stupa. Besides the vertical slabs of the dome, the cornice stones also portray the Jatakas. The panels of the latter, especially, separated from one another by figures in bas-relief of a pair of lovers, Yakkhas, or Nagas, forming purely decorative parts and not connected with the story in the panels. The ends of these cornice stones projected outside the platform in the form of brackets ornamented with Makaras having male and female riders standing on them, the whole resembling woodwork.

Below the panels are a row of medallions in the form of tiny motifs extending from end to end. Besides the scenes from the Jatakas and Buddha's life, there are others portraying local life. The panels are permeated with an air of realism and elegance, movement and expression mark the attractive and spirited figures. The tone and texture of the stone, the plastic quality of the work, and the smoothness of the chiselling with lines and shadows combine to stamp the impression of supple and living flesh. Among the animals, the elephants are sculptured to perfection. At Dhanyakataka, as also in Nagarjunakonda, sculptors showed themselves adept not only in the conventional symbolic representation of things and events but also in narrative sculpture, a field in which they exercised their superb talents with equal effect in the composition of a panel, in balancing a group, in the distinction of planes and in the sequence of the narrative. They excel likewise in the synoptic method of introducing one scene into another and showing the same character in the same piece more that once in order to tell the story concisely.

The important sculptures from the Vijayapuri site in Nagarjunakonda are on five beautiful stone pillars. The peculiar ornamentation and the semi-classical portraits carved on these are noteworthy because they recall Greco-Roman and Scythian types. For example, the two figures of a bearded soldier, a Scythian warrior-Kanchuki-wearing a Roman helmet, a quilted long-sleeved tunic and trousers with a waistband-like sash of cloth, holding a heavy spear, perhaps indicate the figures and accoutrement of exotic elements in the military employed by the Satavahana and Ikshvaku kings. This idea gains strength from the example of an inscribed Buddhapada donated by a Saka lady, discovered at a monastery. The other sculpture is a Bacchanalian scene, portraying a male figure, nude to the waist, holding a drinking horn in his left hand, while standing on the ground near his foot is a wine jar covered with an inverted cup,supposed to have been a crude copy of Dionysus. Such instances of classic occidental figures are to be traced to the active sea borne trade between the Roman empire and Andhra in the first three centuries after Christ. To the last period of Dhanyakataka belong the fine sculptures from the Stupa near Goli in the Guntur district. The similarity of subject matter, the finish and poise, style

*bodhisattva dipanankara. 3rd century CE. phanigiri.*

of grouping the figures, and the resemblance in size and form of the paired couples separating one scene from another in the friezes are remarkable. The costumes of the Buddha closely resemble those found in the fourth period at Dhanyakataka.

### Aesthetics

There is a lot of debate whether art found at sites such as Dhanyakataka or Sanchi could be classified Buddhist art since religion cannot be the base for artistic expression and freedom that Dhanyakataka seems to exemplify. Further it would be rather asinine to assume that the artists were Buddhist and were therefore capable of such achievement given the numerous varieties of cults and religions that existed in the sub-continent each having their own artistic manifestations distinct from the others. One would apparently slot the sculptures from Dhanyakataka and Barhut as the 'Buddhist variety' of art even though there was no other cult that had such luxuriant art as the Buddhists did, at least in the early historic period. The expression 'Buddhist art' has no other meaningful function, it would seem, then to demarcate periods in history where and when Buddhism had played a relatively major cultural role.

The situation of a Buddhist monastery in an specific ethnosphere, its role in facilitating trade and its purpose as a source of spiritual succour have been examined in the various culture sequences of ancient Andhra during the course of this book. We would like to suggest that sculptural

*return of kantkaka. period four. dhanyakataka.*

art in the lower Krishna Valley was an inclusive part of the monastery as elsewhere and was fulfilling a ritual role as per its ordained function of providing visual inspiration to the circumambulating votary. While it is more then reasonable to free the sculptors and their individual accomplishments of a religious role a discussion on the merits of the art would be incomplete without taking into account the impact such eruditions could have entailed both on the religion and its laity.

The lower Krishna Valley was one of the most successful ethnospheres that harboured the growth of Buddhism. The early urban centres had brought about a huge change in the sociological balance of that cultural sequence. The growth of trade had brought in the various aboriginal groups to integrate into realms of the urban influence where Buddhism started taking root. This helped to forge closer trade ties with cultures far and wide and it meant the further spread of the early urban complexes. The Stupas at Bhattiprolu and Dhanyakataka along with those at Garikapadu and Vaddamanu were ritual attestations of gratitude. The Stupas were the biggest structures ever to be built since the time those areas came under habitation. The embellishments on the Stupas were testimonies of the early monastic establishments at these places getting incorporated into the existing pattern of ritual, which kept getting refined by the centuries as articulated in sculpture. In short every aspect of daily life was replicated in these sculptured panels where the haloed legends of the Buddha, the Jatakas and the mythical representations of the past were corollaries and continuations of a highly ritualised existence. The lack of a definitive theology and the existence of local traditions in early monastic Buddhism was the base for conjuring an entire array of sculpted experience without restrictions of any imposing iconography.

The freedom therefore to blend the alien influence of Buddhism with the indigenous expression extended even to what could be embodied into these panels. The results are staggering. The Buddha being protected by the Naga-Muchilinda with domical huts in the background makes it seem like it happened in a village just outside the town of Dhanyakataka. The stylised labyrinths of serpent bodies on the domes of the Stupa definitely is the nearest we could get to any example showing how closely Buddhism adapted to the totemic groups in the area. The depictions of the Ganas or Dwarfs, the Yakkhas, the Nagas and others usually represented with exaggerated amounts of negative capabilities in post-Vedic lore are at home in these bas-reliefs sowing their grains, worshipping the pillar of fire and making love, not necessarily the most Buddhist of virtues. The emblem like design of the Buddha's alms bowl being taken to the thirty-third heaven has figures arranged in a concentric round with the bowl being at the centre of the carving is a unique example of the ritualisation of life around the monastery.

The Buddhist sculpture in some strange way resembles painting that was done on stone. The undulating flow of people and the way they had been arranged is one the finest ever produced. Hills, trees, creepers, flowers, animals both real and mythical and their fellow travellers the human forms are by far the most sophisticated presentations, unsurpassed in beauty and skill. The prince wears flowing robes that are looser above the waist and a bead necklace along with a besotted expression. Women are shown wearing a long garment waist to feet with as many bangles one could count apart from the big ear rings, anklets both singular and spiralled and the coiffure is usually an assortment of designs that were in all probability in vogue at the time. The kings wears a pendent on the forehead attached to strings of pearls fastened somewhere behind the head and are depicted usually with a swathe of neck length hair. It appears that the normal soldiers had no dress code of their own which is the same as of the king but with lesser jewellery. Most of these men are presented with agile bodies and are laden with swords, lances, shields, maces and sabers. They appear in great detail even while they are not the real focus of the picture. Different castes are depicted with generic dress codes to indicate them as such. The Brahmins are usually seated next to a sacrificial fire with matted hair and flowing beard. The hunter-gatherers are depicted with just a loincloth around their waists with a bow and arrow and sometimes with their catch. The amorous couples almost patently have this kind of a depiction excluding a hunted animal. Blacksmiths, fishmongers, barbers and other workingmen are depicted meticulously. The legends around the birth stories of the Buddha are spectacular. The allurement by Mara and his daughters is a favourite theme repeatedly carved through

272 *kapi jataka* 3rd century CE, gobi

almost all the phases of Dhanyakataka and each time so very differently from the pervious. The motif of the empty throne under the Bo Tree and dancers with charming expressions in the foreground delicately balanced between the central frame of the panel and the edge of the lower frame. The throne and the Bo Tree are carved in a slightly non-linear alignment in order to bring an air of naturalness and to suggest a depth of field to the viewer. This is a remarkable feat achieved at such an ancient date yet so contemporaneous. The sleeping Yasodhara, the fainting queen of Kasi and Sujata approaching the Buddha with nourishment just after his enlightenment are brilliantly executed. The sculptors seem skilled to the point of carving the eyes of a sleeping person and a dead man and knowing the difference. There are some very distinct characteristics of Dhanyakataka sculpture. These could be a quick order:

1. Composition within circular medallions.
2. Stylised presentations of simple design and arrangement.
3. Depiction of distinct kinetics to various characters within a single frame.
4. Gag-reel like format of picture presentation.
5. Presenting an animated movement in a single frame or panel.
6. Purposeful distortion of action with a frame.
7. Reduction and enlargement of carved forms without disturbing the composition.
8. Trying to project the fourth dimension in sculpture.



*(left) adoration scenes of bodhisattvas. 3rd century CE. phanigiri.*

276 *king udayana and his harem period four. dhanyakataka*

*the standing buddhas. 3rd century CE. nagarjunakonda.*

In a circular medallion from Nagarjuanakonda, Drona, a Buddhist monk reveals the begging bowl of the Buddha as part of his share after the Buddha's Nirvana. The sculpture shows people celebrating all around while the whole arrangement makes it look like a royal seal. In another circular medulla the sage Asista comes to visit Buddha, the artiste shows only the ceiling exposing a particular part of a bigger scene. The Bo Tree in this sculpture is carved deliberately in a miniaturised fashion. In the panel where women are shown adoring the feet of Buddha the face of one woman is shown bending forward where as her partner is shown bending sideward while another lady bowing to the Buddha with her head touching the ground. This is rendered in the characteristic Dhanyakataka style.

The method followed by the artists while carving is explained by Vidya Deheja as depiction in a single frame by reducing the two different tales into one particular panel. There is another aspect that she points out where the entire frame is divided into three or more parts giving the whole narrative simplicity in rendition. Reducing or increasing the form of Buddha according to the size of the frame gives it a continuous movement that is a singularly great contribution of the Dhanyakataka style. Most of these narratives seem to be chosen from the Sri Lankan chronicles and their related biographies of the Buddha, the Nidana Katha taking a huge prominence during the earlier periods and later by the Lalita Vistara. In places like Pouni these narratives seemed to have been carved on wood and in later periods on the typical marble like stone that was used even on friezes and individual pillars in the height of the last two mature periods. Another versatile aspect of the carvings done in such circumstances are the depictions concurrently done from opposing sides where they merge at a point giving a poignancy to the frame and the narrative. In some cases these would again deviate into either an upper portion or the lower end of a panel where the narrative is again structured to reach its logical end on some other plane. Such an arrangement is seen in depiction of the legend about the distribution of the Buddha's corporeal relics amongst the various clans where the dividing line is provided by using the stretches of house parallel to the street where the relics are being taken out in a ceremonial procession. The same arrangement is seen in the case of the Sukra carrying the golden bowl left in the River Nairanjana by the Buddha.

The pattern growth of rituals seems to get reflected in the sculpture as far as the sophistication of the mature period is concerned. However the word complex or complexity cannot be used to the sophistication as to the ritualism that can be clearly evidenced from textual sources. The sculptural style of Dhanyakataka scrupulously reflects such evidence. The specificity of a narrative adjusted to a local environment is one pointer to sustain the argument that ritualism had not taken any institutional form despite the fact that Buddhism of that period was slowly showing signs of a unified theme dominated and sustained by Mahayana. It was also during this phase that sculpture that was a local artistic tradition perfected by the artists at Dhanyakataka started spreading its influence initially into Nagarjunakonda, the transitory phases towards the western Deccan and right into the caves of Ajanta.

The historical background that inspired the spread of tradition from Dhanyakataka is rather bleary. It seems likely that the final phases of active trade also prompted a shift in focus in the form and expression of political life itself as can be read between the lines of inscriptions from the

*prince siddhartha's last night in the palace. 3rd century CE. phanigiri.*

last Satavahanas and the succeeding Ikshvakus. The whole ambience could have made Nagarjunakonda more conducive to the sculptors with growing energy of construction activity there that can be dated to the period from the late 2nd century of the Christian era. Gradually the area of Sri Parvata and the new capital Vijayapuri all in the present Nagarjuanakonda valley must have taken over in terms of importance. It was also in this phase that major influences of the Dhanyakataka School can be seen as far as Indonesia, Laos, Burma and Sri Lanka. Sculpture found at the ancient Dhanyakataka site simultaneous to the phases at Nagarjunakonda had been excavated in the late 1970's. These are not on the grand scale of the preceding era but no less eloquent. They are also the only extant examples of individual pieces of sculpture as against the friezes and bas-reliefs that Dhanyakataka usually signifies. One particular piece of a Yakkha shows absolute elegance and dexterity that somehow was still retained at Dhanyakataka but not to a very long stage. With the exception of bronzes found at the site one can be sure that the artistic tradition as such must have reached extinction by the close of the 5th century of the Christian era, roughly at the dawn of the early mediaeval period by which time the entire Nagarjunakonda valley was itself being slowly abandoned. Dhanyakataka as a township survived into the early mediaeval age where it kept receiving patronage but never was again to see the days of some of the greatest art man ever produced.

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# a c k n o w l e d g m e n t s


jaggu babu

vasireddy sarat babu

m n haritha

katari srinivas kanna

chintalapalli ananth

naraharisetti nageswara rao

hampi

bellapu srinivas

addepalli prabhu

national library kolkata:

b nageswara rao

jagmal singh

indrani haldar

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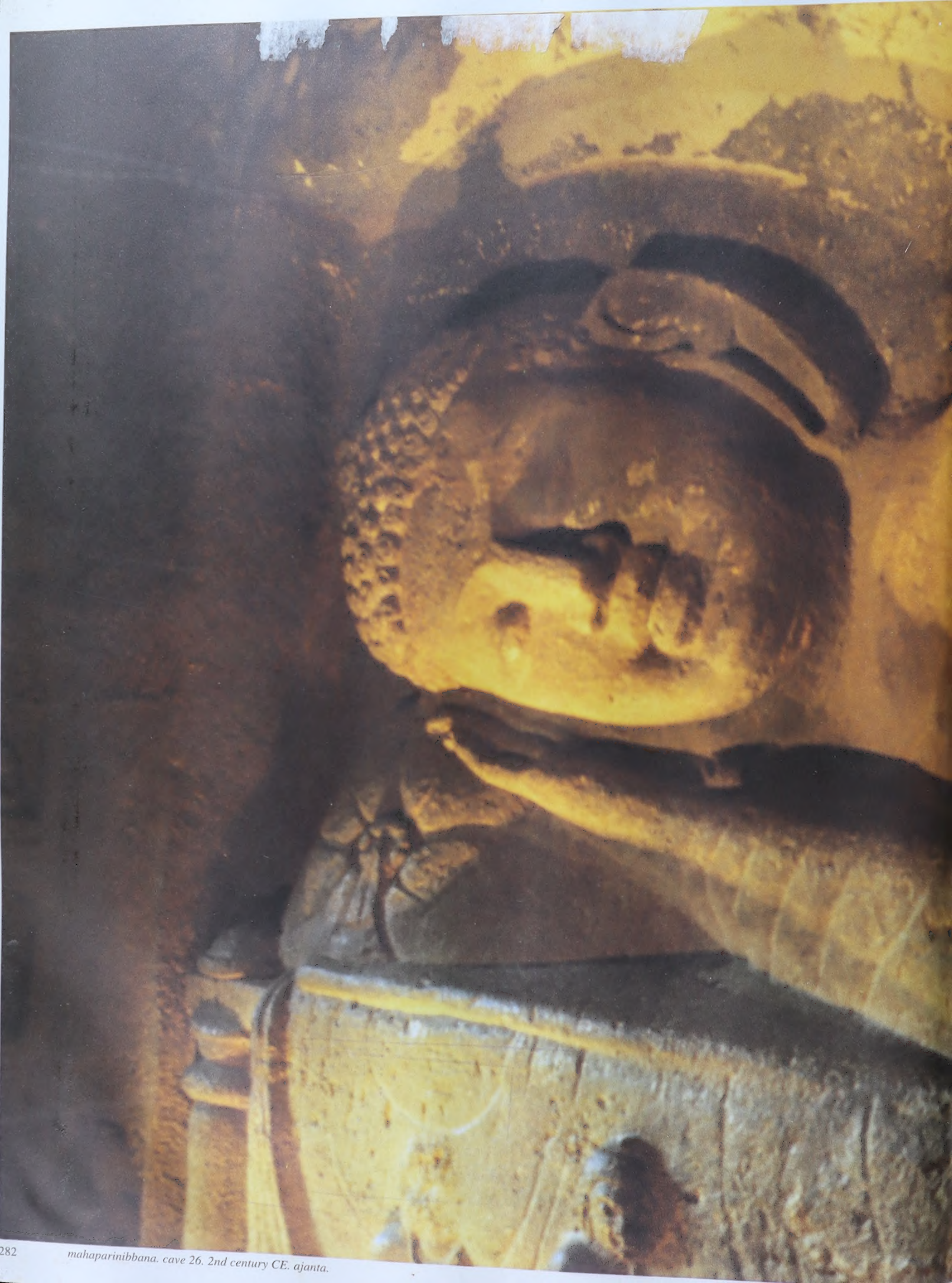
director, andhra pradesh state department of archeology and museums
superintendent archeologist, hyderabad circle, archeological survey of india
curator, tamilnadu state museum, chennai



282 *mahaparinibbana. cave 26. 2nd century CE. ajanta.*

Buddhism in its institutional form followed a pattern of integration, organisation and the spread of influence in concurrence to the early history of ancient societies across the sub-continent. The entire process can be unified into a singular metaphor of the wheel of Dharma that the Buddha had turned during his first sermon at the Deer Park in Sarnath. The integration of various cultures can be seen as spokes of the wheel held by the organisation of early Buddhist Sangha, the swivel. The growth of trade and polity that increased patronage could be seen as the motion of the wheel, which slowed down by the growth of local cults, when Buddhism slowly dissipated to isolation and eventual abandonment.